

Tips and Tools from your ACS counselors: Talking to your child about COVID-19

When events happen in our world that feel out of control, we often experience high levels of stress. Now is a great time for everyone, including parents and caregivers, to remember to practice self-care and self-compassion. Acknowledge your own feelings of stress and anxiety and accept that they are a natural response to a critical situation and one over which we have no control. With that in mind, here are a few easy tools to help you and your child during this time:

- Exercise is a great tool for managing stress and anxiety. Try to carve out time to move your body by keeping up with a current exercise regimen or going for a walk.
- Practice mindful breathing. Deep breathing reminds your brain that you are okay. These exercises can be short, 30-60 seconds of a mindful activity that relieves the pressure that intense periods of stress and anxiety create. They can also be done with children. One technique is breathing in for the count of 5(smelling a flower), holding your breath for 5, and exhaling(blowing out candles) for 5. Do this 5-or-6 times and notice the relief.
- Try using a grounding technique where you look for 5 things you see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can taste, and 1 thing in the present moment that you are grateful for. This exercise focuses on your senses, which are present moment experiences.
- Pay attention to your sleep and make sure you are getting enough rest.

Remain calm and reassuring.

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.
- If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.
- Remind them that you are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available.

- Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
- It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.
- Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.

Avoid excessive blaming.

- When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone. It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.
- Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different from the values that you have at home.

Monitor television viewing and social media.

- Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.
- Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
- Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.
- Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

- Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Be honest and accurate.

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.
- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.
- Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to protect yourself.

If you feel your child needs assistance, please reach out to your school counselor as they can chat over Google Meet or phone with your child.