

CORONAVIRUS TALKING POINTS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Summarized from Adrienne Hollingsworth, AMFT, with Tina Payne Bryson, LCSW, PhD

<https://www.tinabryson.com/news/coronavirus-talking-points-for-parents-amp-teachers-with-the-whole-brain-child-approach>

Keep it simple and be honest: Children are often savvy enough to know if adults aren't being honest (they can sense our hesitation and anxiety) and they can get overwhelmed with lengthy explanations.

- "We know the Coronavirus is similar to a cold, so our approach to prevention is the same; frequent hand washing with warm soapy water for at least 20, keeping your hands away from your face as much as possible, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into your elbow instead of your hands."
- "What we know so far is that only a small number of people get really sick from this and need to go to the hospital. Most people are ok at home."
- "Health care professionals, parents, teachers, and other adults are working hard to keep everyone safe."
- "The news and social media only has enough time to give us a small bit of information. This might make us feel more worried and scared because we are missing other information."

Validate any concerns or feelings: We want the students to feel the "4 S's"; Safe, Seen, Soothed, and Secure. We do that by active listening, helping them to label their feelings, supporting them in asking the questions they need to ask, and validating whatever it is they are experiencing. When they feel seen and heard, they are more likely to have a sense of safety and security.

- "It's normal to feel _____ (scared, sad, worried, upset, etc.) when something like this happens."
- "There is a lot we still don't know, that can sometimes make us feel scared and upset."
- "Everyone is working together to do the best they can to keep everyone safe."
- "We still don't have all the answers. Scientists and doctors are working hard to learn more. When they have new information, they will share it with everyone."
- "We are making a lot of changes right now so that we can all be safe and healthy. This can feel weird and scary but it won't last forever."

Allow them the space to talk further: For any kid who appears to need to talk about these concerns or ideas further, let them know they can always ask more questions or re-open the conversation. For any students that seem excessively distraught pull them aside and call the office to get further support from guidance.

- "I'm here, I'm listening. We'll get through this together."
- "It seems like you have lots of questions and feelings about this and that's ok. I'm going to see if someone else (e.g. guidance, admin, resource, ssw, psych) is available to talk to you about this more."

Manage your own big feelings: Adults really do set the emotional tone for our children. Our chaos or calm are contagious. If you're panicked, chaotic internally, and obsessive about the news, you will dial up your child's anxiety and they will focus on what they *can't* control. If you are informed, calm internally, and share bits of information about what we *can* control, you will dial down your child's anxiety.

- "Sometimes I feel a bit scared and overwhelmed too! But I remind myself that it's going to be ok, we are all working together to stay safe, and I know some of the things I can do to help myself and you to stay healthy."