

As the number of new cases of coronavirus infection continue to rise the impact is now being felt in schools in Australia. It's therefore important for parents to be there for their children to ease any concerns they may have about the virus and how it could affect them. So here's some advice for parents to help them and their children stay informed.

### 1. Control during uncertainty

The new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 causes the disease COVID-19, which can be like a common cold but it can also have more serious complications. Signs of infection may include: fever, cough and shortness of breath. Some severe cases can involve pneumonia or kidney failure with more serious consequences.

One reason people experience anxiety during a pandemic is uncertainty about its impact. Research during the 2009 swine flu (H1N1) pandemic found those people who struggled with uncertainty were more likely to see the pandemic as threatening, and this can lead to increased levels of anxiety.

One way to provide our children with certainty in uncertain times is with facts, for example, telling them the evidence so far shows children are less likely to experience severe symptoms than older adults.

You can also help them gain a sense of control by giving them strategies to help prevent them catching the virus.

### 2. Practise good hygiene

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says we should channel our concern into good hygiene.

Encourage your children to wash their hands with soap and water frequently (particularly after going to the toilet, coming from a public place, and before and after eating).

Children should also use a tissue to sneeze into and put the tissue in the bin afterwards.

### 3. Be careful with the news media

A quick scan of the news brings up headlines such as "Australia's coronavirus death rate could proportionally be worse than China's, expert warns". This report even includes a graph showing "How likely are you to die from Coronavirus?"

Exposing children to such reports can increase their fear and anxiety.

There is a clear and strong relationship between what children see as threatening information in the media and their level of fear.

So be careful with what news media your children are exposed to. Try to watch, listen or read it with them so you are there for any questions they may have.

### 4. Stay with the facts

When answering such questions, use information from the World Health Organisation and other trustworthy sources to inform yourself.

Filter some of the incorrect information around preventing COVID-19 (eating garlic, having hot baths) and inform your family with the correct information. Don't be someone who passes on incorrect information to your children or others.

#### 5. Talk about your feelings

It's OK to feel worried. Talking about your feelings of stress can help you work through them.

If you try to push down feelings of stress this can have an impact on your health.

As parents you only have to listen and hear your child's concerns. You can't promise things will be safe or certain. But you can assure them that as a family you will work together to manage whatever comes up in the future and that you are there to listen to them.

#### 6. Don't pass on your fear

Research from the 2009 Swine Flu pandemic showed children's fear of the disease was significantly related to their parents' fear of the disease.

This effect of parents passing on fear even exists when there is nothing to fear. Research showed if parents get negative information about something that is harmless, they are more likely to pass on those negative beliefs to their children and increase their level of fear.

So even if you feel stressed about COVID-19, you need to make sure you don't pass on this fear to your children. Show them you are calm. Don't be a carrier for fear.

#### 7. Keep on living life

It is easy to get swept away with panic about the future and what may happen. But being future-focused only contributes to anxiety.

Help your child to focus on the now and what they are doing today. These things are in their control – work hard at school, train for netball. Continue their routine and enjoy the moments.

#### 8. Work together

This is not a time to be selfish, but to work together and support one another.

Be kind to others (don't steal their toilet paper) and encourage your children to be kind to others as well.

Being less self-focused helps to alleviate stress and give life more meaning and purpose.

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