

SANTA FE ISD – STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Talking with Students about COVID-19

Students across the nation are starting to realize that they are not just on a break from school. Now that we are into week two of our home from school quarantine and the nation is increasing their expectations for social distancing, our children are starting to react. This looks different for different individuals, but it's important to know that parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults can play a big role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. Below are some tips from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19.

Remain calm and reassuring

Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.

Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
- Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff. (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities)

Make yourself available to listen and to talk.

Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.

Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.

Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

Provide information that is honest and accurate.

Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child. Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Get children into a handwashing habit.

Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol.

For more guidelines from the Center for Disease Control, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Children's Reactions to Crisis

It is also important to consider how a child may react in during time of crisis. Below you will find common reactions that children use to cope with crisis related situations and some potential ways to help them through those situations.

Pre-K- Elementary School Student Reactions	Ways to respond to this behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumb sucking • Bedwetting • Clinging to parents • Sleep disturbances • Loss of appetite • Fear of the dark • Regression in behavior • Withdrawal from friends and routines • Irritability • Aggressiveness • Nightmares • School work avoidance • Poor concentration • Asking about the health of family members • Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure them that you always care for them and will continue to take care of them, so they feel safe • Give examples of steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands • Be open, honest, and sensitive. They want and need to know what is happening • Get down to their eye level and speak in a calm, gentle voice using words they can understand • Encourage quiet time • Encourage positive activities • Provide extra attention and comfort • Stick to family routine • Listen to the child's repeated questions and respond appropriately • Ask "What do you think?" • Encourage expressions of thoughts and feelings through conversations and activities

Junior High/High School Student Reactions	Ways to respond to this behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor Concentration • Being withdrawn, self-focusing • Pessimistic worldview • Denial of emotions to themselves or parents; respond with "I'm Ok" or even silence when they are upset • Complaining about physical aches or pains because they cannot identify what is really bothering them. • Engaging in risky behaviors • Sleep/Eating Disturbances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow them to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions without judgement • Allow time to communicate with peers • Normalize their reactions • Ask about what worries them and what might help them cope • Offer comfort with gentle words or just be present with them • Encourage quiet time • Encourage positive activities • Provide extra attention and comfort • Stick to family routine • Encourage expressions of thoughts and feelings through conversations and activities

For more information from the National Association of School Psychologists, visit <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>