Parenting Through COVID-19

Empowering Parents—talking to your children about coronavirus

* + In order to get updates on coronavirus, please inform yourselves with a reliable source, such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO) websites
  + During these unprecedented times, everyone is feeling stressed and has their own fears and anxiety; this is normal, but it is important to be prepared—don’t panic

Parents may be struggling to balance a number of things:

* + Work
  + Childcare
  + Self-care
  + Other worries of concern
  + Increase risk of abuse

The next part of this document will provide advice to help parents cope with the coronavirus pandemic

Positive Discipline Strategies

* Engage your children in constructive activities
  + Ie. Sensory activities will help if your child is over stimulated
  + Call for “time out” (not for punishment); you and your child can both do this
    - Ie. Pretending to “blow on the soup/ blow out the candle” is the same as taking a deep breath. This will help you to set boundaries/discipline, and build up your child’s capacity
    - “Let’s calm down.” We say this often but children will not know what this really means unless you demonstrate it to them—hence “blow on the soup”. You can also take a deep breath and count to three.
    - Teaching your child how to calm down can eventually give them self-independent skills; when they need to “calm down”, they will have the skills to know what to do.

Remember, their lives, specifically their routines, are being interrupted (ie. out of school, not playing with friends, etc..)

* Know when not to respond
  + The most powerful tool for effective discipline is attention
    - Ignoring any unwanted behaviors can be an effective way to stop them if that is the goal, and as long as your child is not hurting themselves.
  + When you catch your child doing something positive, be sure to acknowledge them
    - It is a good idea to give your child attention throughout the day. When they are least expecting it, give them a 30 second burst of attention; acknowledge them in a positive way before moving on

Self-care tips for Parents

* Building Resilience
  + Take care of yourself—value what keeps you healthy
  + Value relationships – schedule time to spend it with your spouse or friends
  + Notice the things that are going well – remember to stay focused and be strong for your family
  + Take a few minutes to do some mindfulness-practices
  + Stay motivated—recognized that when we feel better and stronger, we can help our children and families

Coping Strategies

* Take breaks
* Stay informed but in moderation (ie. watching the news/ avoid too much exposure to the news); read up on information from reliable sources—facts matter
* Stay connected to one another
* Seek help when needed
* Take care of your body and mental health

How to talk to children

* Before talking to your children, make sure you are prepared to…
  + Know what to say when it comes to the news, school, family members, etc…
  + Stay calm and try not to panic
  + Be mindful of your demeanor
  + Process you and your child’s fears in a positive and healthy way
  + Be a role model

Talking to toddlers:

* Toddlers notice everything. Talk to your toddler at an age-appropriate level. Be brief, truthful, and specific
  + Answer their questions directly
  + Keep it simple – use language that they can understand
  + Validate the exchange
  + Manage expectations
* During these trying times, your toddler’s routine has been interrupted and their routine creates a sense of security. You can say that you are going to be stay with mom and dad instead of going to the daycare. You can also create a routine similar to their daycare routine, “In the morning we will go for a walk, and then we will have a snack.” This will help to manage your toddler’s expectations.
  + For younger toddlers, if they need a more visual representation, you can draw alongside them in order to show them the plans for the day.

Signs that your child is stressed

* Excessive crying
* Returning to old behaviors that they have outgrown
  + (Ie. being potty trained to wetting the bed)
* Excessive worrying or sadness
* Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
* Ways you can support your child
  + Assess what your child knows
  + Start by asking what they heard/know about the virus
  + Do not create any unnecessary anxiety
* Do not dismiss your child’s fears—listen to them. Connect with them; track their feelings and validate them when the situation calls to do so

Overall, try to frame any school closures as a positive event

* Prepare activities to do with your child (ie. online shopping for new books to read)
* Maintain a routine to try and keep things orderly within your home
* Create a balance in overall scheduling
* Incorporate journaling throughout your day to track and process both you and your child’s feelings

As always, enjoy your time together with your toddler

Stay strong and stay safe,

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