Tips for talking with children about coronavirus

It can be overwhelming to see and hear all the news about the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). With information more at our disposal than ever, teenagers can be self-sufficient when it comes to learning about the latest news about the virus. However, it is still important for families to have their own discussion about the pandemic – such as, assuring your child of any risk and making sure that young people understand what social distancing involves. This can alleviate some of the anxiety that you, and your children, may be feeling. Keeping an open dialogue with your child can help them to cope with the changes.

Be calm and honest

When new and stressful situations arise, children can feel overwhelmed and worried. Therefore, it is important to let them speak to you about any concerns they may have regarding the virus. Be honest and calm – young people can pick up the feelings from other people. Talk about common misunderstandings about COVID-19, such as the origin of the virus. Give them room to share how they are feeling and acknowledge and validate the stress they may be under.

As COVID-19 is less common and severe in children compared to older people, it should be noted that teenagers can often feel more worried for their parents and grandparents during this time than themselves. Assure them that there are ways you and your family can prevent the virus such as self-isolating, practicing social distancing and maintaining hygiene.

Offer understanding and reassurance

For teenagers, a disappointing aspect of the coronavirus pandemic is not being able to see their friends or being allowed to go out during isolation. Teenagers are at an age where their peers are fundamental for their development. Experiencing the loss of many events such as school formal, Sports Day, festivals and parties can be painful.

Allow your child time to express how they feel. Make sure that you validate their disappointment and understand that it can be lonely to stay home for a long period of time. Remind your child that are other ways to interact with their friends. Social distancing does not necessarily mean the end of a social life.

Emphasise social distancing and hygiene

Make sure that your young person(s) understand the importance of social distancing and good hygiene. One of the best ways to prevent coronavirus is to encourage regular handwashing and social distancing.

Some young people may feel that this may not affect them as much as others and may want to see their friends. Remind them that we cannot be sure that their friends are well and that there is a risk of bringing the virus into the home.

Change their mindset

While it goes without saying that there has been and will be an amount of negative impacts as a result of COVID-19, parents can take the time to discuss with children of the potential positive aspects that can also arise from this incidence. Take time to list the possible positive areas that can come from self-isolation. For example: *I have time to read more during isolation. I can learn how to cook a new recipe.*

Limiting COVID-19 conversation and taking time off social media is a good way to destress and lessen your child's anxiety about the virus. There is a lot of information to consume, and there are constant updates minute by minute. Some information can be alarmist, sensationalised and negative