**Why Can’t I Go to School?: Helping young children understand Coronavirus (COVID19)**

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During stressful times children want to know two things: *will I be safe, and who will take care of me*? Parents should discuss the Comronavirus in a way that kids can understand but without spreading panic. The good news is that children do not seem to be vulnerable to this virus, but they can spread it. Let the kids know that they will be safe. Then discuss what they can do to keep others safe. Safe practices include washing hands, sneezing into a tissue or their elbow, and maintaining a safe distance from others in public. Explain that this is called **social distancing** and that it is temporary. Still, it is our best defense against the Coronavirus. This will help kids understand why their school is closed and why folks are staying inside. Be clear about the importance of taking these precautions to keep others safe.

Children may ask many questions. Be honest, but keep explanations simple. Be prepared for children to ask the same questions over and over. This is their way of getting reassurance. Validate their sad or anxious feelings and let them know that their message has been received. Some level of truth and frankness is in order. Let them know that people will get sick. But remind them of all of the heroes in our community that are doing everything they can to help. Help the child to think of some things that are helpful such as house cleaning, doing chores, and calling loved ones to see how they are doing. Put firm limits on how much television children are exposed to- especially frightening information about the pandemic.

Children with anxiety or those who have been through recent disasters, or have suffered trauma or loss may have a particularly hard time with the way things are. School is a major source of safety and security for many kids; without it, some feel lost. If the child is participating in therapy, try to continue this practice in whatever way is possible (including virtual sessions). Read books with the child about feelings to get a conversation going (The Worry Woo series is excellent for young children). Remember to stick with familiar rules and routines at home, such as meal and bedtimes. Look into virtual schools on the web and tune in daily for structure (or make a learning time schedule). Keep the children busy and active. Ride bikes, tumble around, have a dance party. Pray or meditate together if this is a regular practice. Increase respectful touch, reassuring words, and patience. Anxious children may become oppositional, defiant, and even destructive. This is the "icky" feeling being thrown around. A trusted adult should schedule extra time to be present to the child in play or nurturing activities. Help children name or discuss their feelings and provide coping strategies. Practice calming thoughts and deep breathing daily. Parents should remind themselves and the children that this will pass.