



“Keep lines of communication open and support your children in this time of the pandemic” Merimna’s suggestions for parents

When faced with a traumatic life event, one of the most important factors in effectively supporting children is to maintain and enhance their sense of security. During this time of the pandemic, in order for them to feel safe, it is necessary to discuss with them what is happening, to listen to their concerns and to meet their needs as they experience unprecedented experiences in their lives.

- ✦ **Do not wait for children to ask you questions. Ask them what they understand about the coronavirus pandemic and invite them to share their questions.**

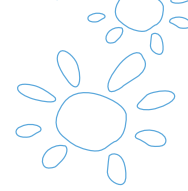
Start the discussion by asking open-ended questions, such as “What do you understand about coronavirus?” Listen to and identify potential misconceptions before informing them. Encourage children to share all of their questions, which may not be about the coronavirus itself, but the troublesome changes that the pandemic has brought about in their daily lives.

- ✦ **Give simple answers to whatever concerns them and correct any misconceptions.**

Explain things using simple and age appropriate language. Children are strongly influenced, both by what you tell them, as well as how you inform them. Begin the discussion calmly and be sure to pay attention to and answer what they are asking. The older the children the more information you can give. Correct any misunderstandings that may have been created. Recognize that the coronavirus pandemic is unprecedented for young and old alike, and has brought about changes in the lives of people around the world. Emphasize that the protection measures taken are aimed at protecting everyone so that as few people as possible get sick.

- ✦ **Avoid emotionally charged words and expressions.**

Lately, children may have been hearing that they are responsible for spreading the coronavirus to their grandparents who are at risk of getting sick because of them. Talk to them about the term “moving bombs” and how this does not describe them and be sure to alleviate them of guilt feelings in case a loved one falls ill. Reassure them that they are not to blame for what is happening. Avoid phrases such as “this is war!”, which are easily misinterpreted. Explain to older children how exaggeration often characterizes people’s expressions in times of crisis.



✧ **Avoid overwhelming the child with information.**

Do not overwhelm children with information they have not asked for, and do not share everything you know. Avoid constant exposure to news, images and programs that often foster a climate of panic and can increase their stress. Turn off the TV and radio. Make an effort to learn about the latest developments from the media, when the children are not present.

✧ **Give children time and space to express their feelings and concerns.**

Do not minimize their worries and do not criticize when they share their feelings with you. Make time for them and listen to them. Many children express themselves through play and drawings or some may show changes in behavior such as; excess attachment to significant others and/or fear of separation, crying, disobedience, aggression, difficulty sleeping, regressive behaviors (to earlier age behaviors), or withdrawal. Adolescents may behave as if nothing is happening or become cynical and/or exaggerated in their reactions. Avoid reprimanding them or overwhelming them with a barrage of "musts". Show understanding and try to recognize the stress that such behaviors can hide.

✧ **Act as a role model for your children.**

Emphasize how we can all protect ourselves and others. Talk about hygiene rules and the need to be careful, without panic and exaggeration. Explain to them why they cannot freely visit relatives and friends at this time.

✧ **Establish a new routine.**

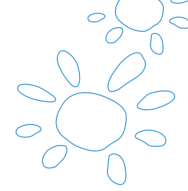
A routine provides a sense of security for children and helps them to adapt to new conditions for as long as they last. Assure them that some things will remain the same (ie: a bedtime story) even if many things have changed in their lives. Keep some habits constant, such as at meal times and bedtime rituals. Develop a new activity plan with your children and consult with other parents for "online communication" with friends and classmates.

✧ **Listen and pay attention to children's concerns about the future.**

While we can't predict how things will turn out, assure the children that the crisis touches all of us and that scientists around the world are working hard to tackle coronavirus and find the right medication and vaccine.

Contact Merimna to learn how to support your children if a member of your family needs to be hospitalized, their life is in danger or they die from coronavirus.

Merimna's Psychological Support lines are
210-64.63.62.2 (Athens)
2310-510.010 (Thessaloniki)



Frequently asked questions by children

“Why are so many people wearing masks?”

Explain how the coronavirus is transmitted and how we can protect ourselves. Explain to them how wearing a mask has been found to be one of the best ways for everyone to be protected. The mask, if worn correctly over the nose and mouth, can protect both people who have symptoms from spreading the virus and people who don't have the virus from getting it. It is especially important to wear the mask when we have close contact with people (less than 2 meters).

“When will the schools reopen?”

Explain that we do not yet know for sure because this pandemic is an unprecedented experience. We do know that because the virus is transmitted very easily, it is important that not many children are in the same areas (e.g. class or gym), in order to protect themselves and others.

“Why aren't you going to work?”

Explain that you are working from home in order to avoid meeting with a lot of people in the same place and that many people from your job now work from home. Clarify to them that this does not mean that your coworkers are sick. Emphasize that we need to protect ourselves so that as few people as possible get sick.

“What if you or I get the virus?”

Explain that your family is taking the necessary precautions and following the official state instructions in order to stay safe, but that sometimes, some parents and children get sick without wanting to. Assure them that if the coronavirus affects your family you will all deal with it calmly following the advice of doctors.

“Can't a doctor do something about this virus?”

This virus is new. We know that it appeared in humans only 6 months ago. Doctors and scientists around the world are working hard to find an effective medicine and vaccine that will protect us in the future. In the meantime we need to follow the instructions given to us by the experts to protect ourselves and others.

“Why can't we see grandma and grandpa these days?”

Explain to the children that by staying away from our loved ones at this time, we are building a safety net around those who may be more susceptible to the virus. In this way we can protect them and in the meantime we can keep in touch with them by phone and with video calls which they enjoy very much.

Recognize the needs of your children in times of crisis

- Need for security.
- Need to understand what has happened.
- Need to express their feelings and questions.
- Need to actively participate in the reconstruction of family life.
- Need to establish a new routine and maintain new habits.
- Need for constant and long-term support.