

Parent Q & A with K.D.



Can little kids can sense that something is wrong or has changed? If so, what do you do about that?

The answer is yes, they can and will sense that something is wrong. This is an excellent question, and many parents have struggled with this concern. We worry if we say anything, it will scare them, and our first impulse is to avoid the subject completely, or we may overshare at a level that is not appropriate for the child. So, you definitely need to speak to your children/adolescents and let them know what is happening. They already know something is off even if they can't verbalize it. Sometimes children and teens, if they aren't told the truth, will make up something that might be worse and think about it over and over.

Basic rules: keep it short and simple, keep it age-appropriate, limit access to the news, and keep your own emotions in check when speaking with your child/adolescent.

For younger children, your conversation might sound like "I want you to know that there are some germs out there that are getting people sick. So right now, we have to stay at home and fight the germs together by washing hands and staying home from school." Children feel safe when they know what is happening and feel empowered to take action to protect themselves.

If at all possible, refrain from talking about worries about finances (I know, super hard) and other adult issues in front of your children. It is ok to say to your child, "We need to work together right now because things are tight, and here are the ways you can help." We should avoid repetitively talking about worries in front of children because it makes them feel unsafe.

For adolescents, the same principles apply, but what you can say, and the level of detail you give is different. Adolescents will push for details and answers. We can give them what's really happening in a really positive way. We should provide the details, so they know the situation is serious enough to comply with the rules. However, make sure that you phrase it in a positive and comforting way. You could say something like: "I am not going to lie to you, even though what I share might scare you. You know about the virus already, and it is scary but I want you to know if we follow the rules and wash our hands, I am confident we will be fine. Also, I might have to say "no" to you regarding purchases for a while. We need to be conservative, but we are going to be ok, I got this!"

I encourage you to have these conversations with your adolescents early on for prevention.

-K.D. Bryant, LPC, School Based Mental Health Specialist

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