

# Mental Health & Wellness

## Guidance from New York State Department of Health related to Covid 19

For Parents, Including Parents of Children with Pre-Existing Anxiety Disorders:

- Talk about the situation openly. Most kids elementary-aged and up have heard about COVID-19 or coronavirus. Avoiding the topic or providing blanket reassurances is more likely to feed anxiety. If kids bring up the topic, let them know you are glad they brought it up. This increased the likelihood that they will come to you with further anxieties or questions.
- Don't give more information than is requested. Part of a developmentally appropriate approach is to answer the question your child asks, but not necessarily more than that. Check to make sure they understood your response by asking them to repeat back what they heard, and let them know you are open to more questions. Reassure your child that it is normal to feel scared or anxious.
- Help your school-aged child and adolescent set boundaries on their information flow in the same way you are setting your own boundaries. Help them identify factual sources of information and set appropriate intervals to check-in. Encourage them to use their media literacy skills to question the messages they are getting from various information channels. Consider limiting media exposure or consuming media with your child so that you can be available to interpret and explain information.
- Keep as many routines intact as possible. For kids who may be out of school and/or have extra-curricular activities canceled, it is helpful to keep other routines, like mealtimes and bedtimes. To the extent possible, for kids who are at home for longer periods of time, set up a structure. Collaborate with your child to come up with a loose schedule, such as an outdoor activity and lunch prep in the morning, and a movie and homework time in the afternoon.
- Find fun ways to maintain contact with individuals your child is separated from, such as elderly grandparents or classmates at school. Set up opportunities to maintain and even grow connections, such as reading a book to grandparents on video calls or sending postcards to friends.
- Encourage physical activity and time outside, where possible. Both staying active and having opportunities to be in nature are helpful in mitigating anxiety and building resilience.
- Use this as an opportunity to teach distress tolerance skills that will be helpful to your kids in any situation. This is a great time to learn about purposeful breathing, guided imagery, distraction, and other skills.