

More than A Virus:

Responding to Our Own and Our Children's Feelings Around the COVID-19 Virus

April 7th, 2020; By Sara Silva- STARS Coach, Child Care Connections



As parents, we worry about so many things and the novel coronavirus has upped the ante by bringing so many concerns to the forefront: Will I be able to keep my job? How will I ensure that my children are able to keep up with their schoolwork? How can I find care for my children with my childcare being closed? How can I make sure my family's needs are met? How do I keep my children safe? What will happen if one of us gets sick? When will this end?!?

These very real concerns are never far from our thoughts and they are most likely impacting our mental wellbeing. We may find that we have difficulty focusing or sleeping, and that our patience

with our children's exuberance is not quite where we would like it to be. We may well find ourselves in "survival mode" where the lesser evil is to get our children engaged in screen time.

Our children are also being greatly impacted by the effects that these concerns have on us (in many more ways than having more screen time). Children learn how to respond to what is happening by observing their loved ones. They are so finely tuned to us that even our moods are absorbed, no matter how well we try to hide our stress. When they are not aware of the reason behind what is happening and the changes that they are experiencing in their lives, then they tend to create their own narrative around what they are experiencing (which can often be inaccurate and self-blaming). Our children rely on us to create a "narrative" of their experiences. This means that they need us to talk to them about what is happening in a reassuring way that they can understand. We can do this through the conversations that we have and through social stories (such as [this one](#)). It takes time for children to process what is happening so that means that we may need to repeat the same phrases and stories over and over again.

Providing reassurance can be challenging when we ourselves don't feel reassured. We can tackle the effects of the stress caused by the pandemic (and its responses) together with our children. Here are a few things to try:

- Go for a walk in the community
- Practice taking deep belly breaths (inhaling through the nose and slowly blowing out through our mouths) – these deep breaths calm down our whole nervous system
- Play, sing, and read together
- Take "imagination vacations" (using [guided imagery](#))
- Use video calling to keep in touch with family and friends
- Talk honestly about feelings and events

Stay well! 😊

Additional resources:

- Zero to Three's [Tips for Families: Coronavirus](#)
- Social Story: [Helping Children Understand COVID-19](#)
- Helping Children Recognize and Understand:
 - [Fear \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [Sadness \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [Frustration \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [Disappointment \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [Anger \(Spanish\)](#)