

Helping Families with Children and Youth Build Resilience in the Era of COVID-19

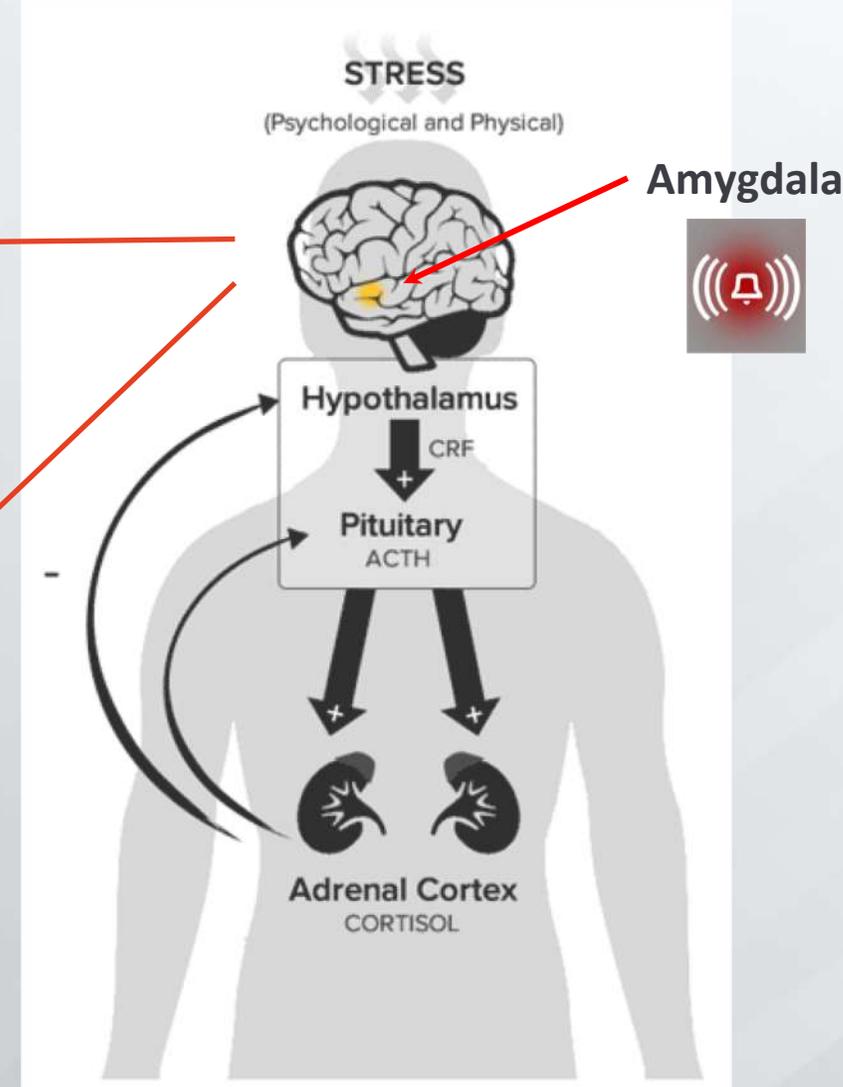
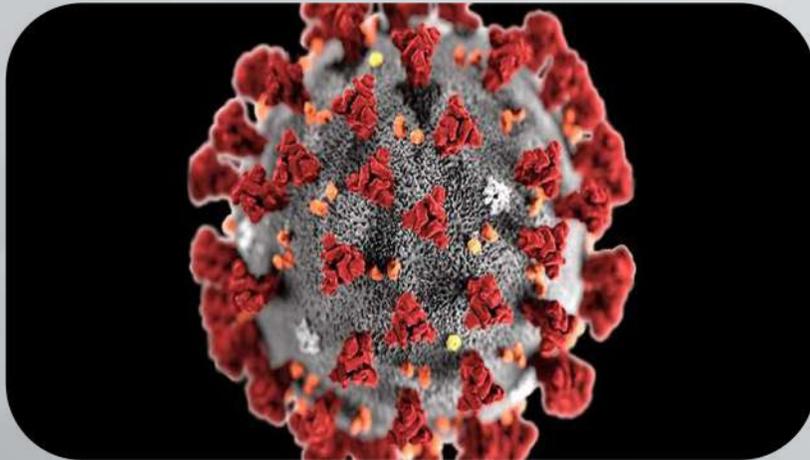
Part I: What We Say and How We Say it Matters

Presenter: Jim Rodriguez, LCSW, PhD

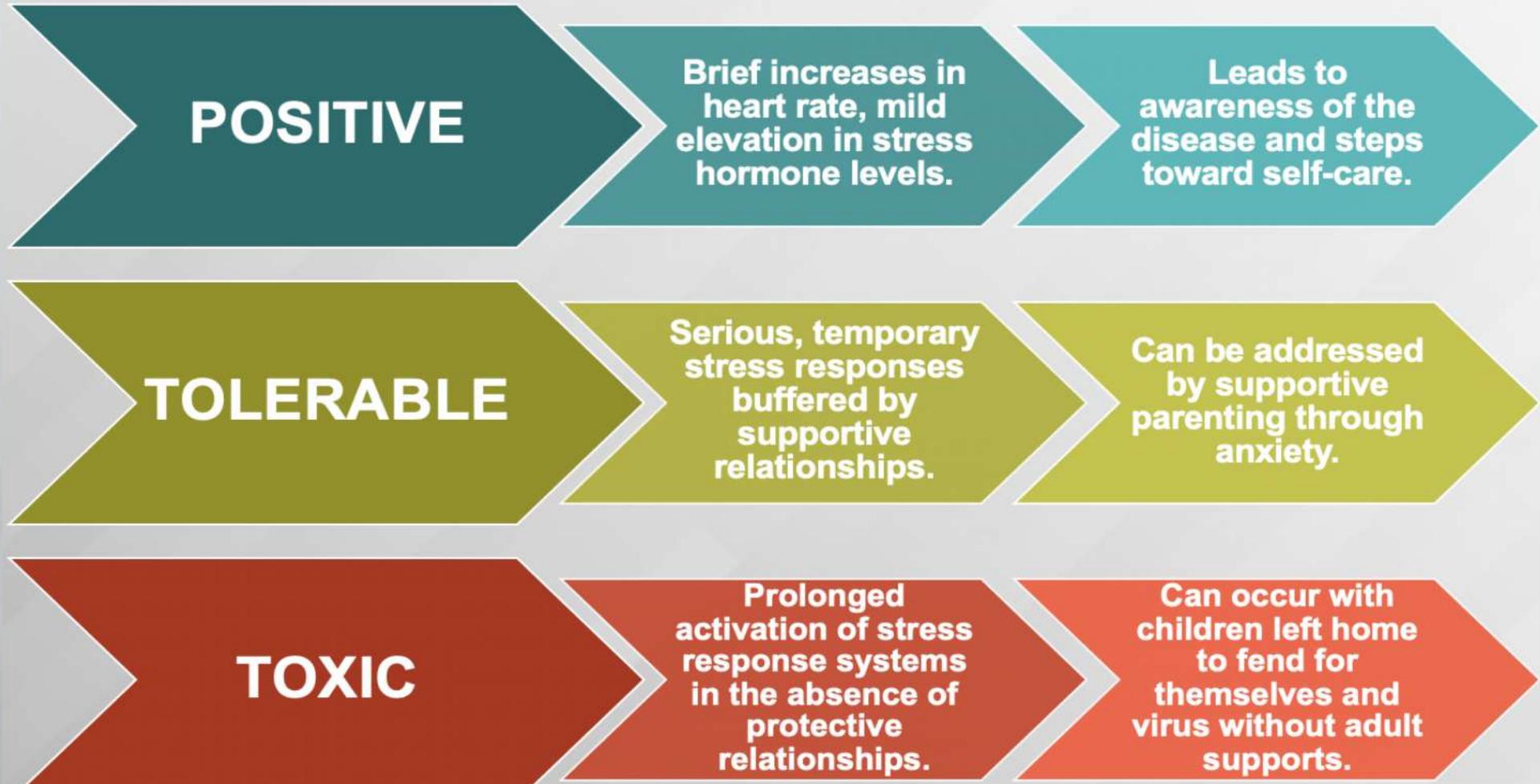
Agenda

- 1. Discuss COVID-19 as a potential stressor**
- 2. Overview of the human stress response**
- 3. Strategies for responding to children and youth**

Human Stress Response



Types of Stress in the Era of COVID-19



Responses to High Threat

Fight



- Irritability
- Loss of Temper
- Defensiveness

Flight



- Avoidance
- Anxiety
- Fear

Freeze



- Numbing
- Detachment
- Giving Up Easily

Risk Factors

- ▶ **Children and youth are particularly at-risk because this is a new experience.**
- ▶ **Children and youth with too much media exposure.**
- ▶ **Children and youth with sick family members or relatives.**
- ▶ **Children and youth without nurturing and consistent care.**
- ▶ **Children and youth with a history of mental health disorders such as anxiety, stress related disorders, depression and ADHD**

**Parent or Caregiver
Stress**

**Resilience
Building
Responses**

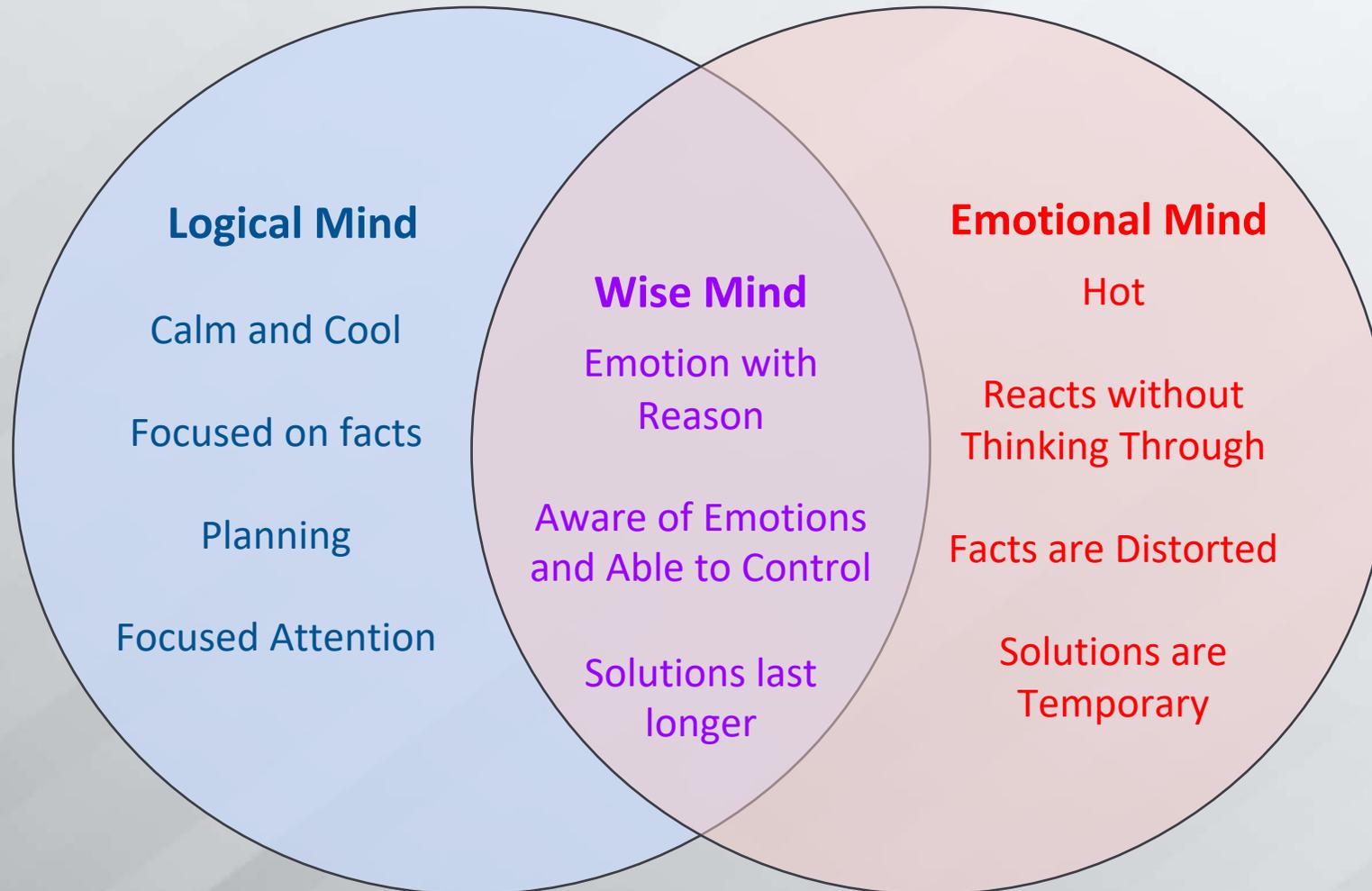
**Resilience
Building
Responses**



**Family
Stress**

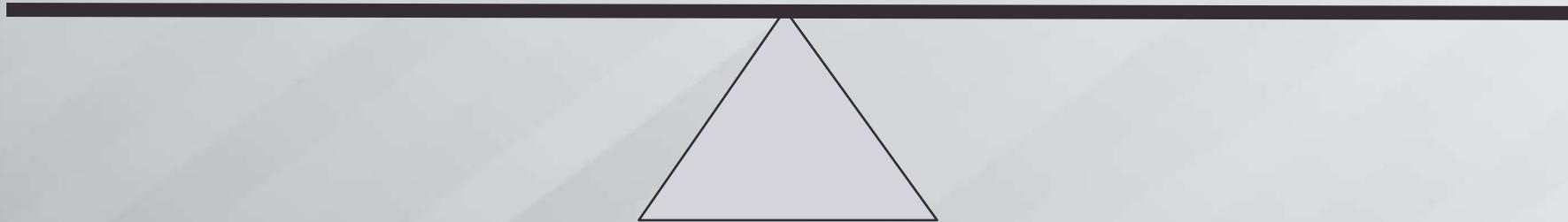
**Child/Adolescent
Stress**

Wise Mind



Balancing Act

Talking with children and young people about the coronavirus is balancing act



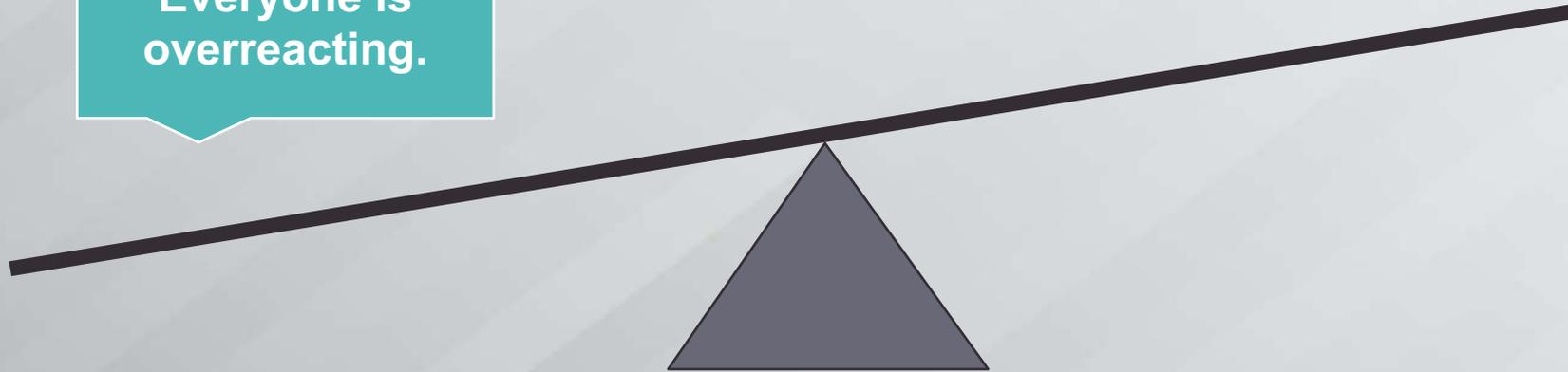
Messages can increase anxiety in children and youth



Messages can minimize the issue for children and youth

Don't worry,
everything
is fine.

Everyone is
overreacting.



A Balancing Act

Children are not getting it as bad as older people but you still have to be careful.

Most people have mild symptoms.

How to Respond

How to Talk to Children and Youth About COVID-19 - Communication is KEY

- ▶ **Make time to talk and connect**
 - Let children know you want to hear their concerns
 - Also, connect about non-COVID related topics (school, connecting with friends)
- ▶ **Non-verbal communication - body language and tone are important**
 - Stay calm - speak softly and avoid shouting
 - Try to avoid: looking tense (e.g. pacing, clenching your teeth)
- ▶ **Verbal reaction - what you say is important**
 - Focus on messages that balance safety with being cautious
 - Be honest and reassuring
 - Remind them that you and other adults will do what you can to keep them safe

What to Talk About



- ▶ **Check in regularly but don't push**
- ▶ **Find out what your child already knows and follow your child's lead.**
 - *There's been a lot of talk about the coronavirus. Tell me what you've heard about it? --> What have you heard?*
 - *What do you think about this?*
 - *How does it make you feel? --> How are you feeling about it*
 - *What questions do you have? --> Do you have any questions?*
- ▶ **Give children and youth an opportunity to share their feelings**
- ▶ **Validate and normalize feelings - loneliness, fears, boredom, anxiety, stress are normal reactions**

Practicing Safety to Feel in Control

- ▶ **Give children specific things to do to feel in control**
 - Healthy habits - sleep, staying hydrated (with water!!!), balanced diet
 - Helping out around the house (i.e. chores to keep things clean)
- ▶ **Talk about all the things that are happening to keep kids safe**
 - Hospitals are preparing and learning how to deal with the crisis
 - Scientists are working to develop a vaccine
 - Schools are closed
- ▶ **Limit Media Exposure and Put News in Context**
 - Deaths are rare even though it might sound worse if you watch the news
 - Staying home is helping in many places
- ▶ **Allow contacts with family or friends who children might worry about**



Things to Stay Safe

- ▶ **Stay home and away from others as much as possible**
- ▶ **Avoid people who are sick**
- ▶ **Try to stay at least 6 feet away from others**
- ▶ **Wash your hands well and often**
 - For at least 20 seconds (sing the A-B-C song while you lather soap and water)
 - If available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
 - Covering mouth and nose with tissue or sneeze/cough into your arm
- ▶ **Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth**
- ▶ **Keep the household clean - use household cleaner to clean or disinfect surfaces.**



Provide Reassurance and Information

Examples of Accurate Information

- ▶ *There's a virus like the flu and there's no cure (or vaccine), so everyone needs to be careful.*
- ▶ *It spreads through little drops (droplets) that people pass when they cough or sneeze. That's why we have to stay inside and keep distance when we're around others.*
- ▶ *Children are not getting it as bad as older people or people who are already sick. You still have to be careful.*
- ▶ *Most people have mild symptoms or no symptoms.*

Reassuring Messages

If no one has symptoms at home:

- ▶ *No one in our house has symptoms right now. We're safe and will keep working on staying safe.*
- ▶ *Adults are trying to keep you safe, which is why schools are closed.*
- ▶ *Washing your hands will **help** stop germs from spreading.*
- ▶ *We have to be careful for now, **but things will get better.***

Offer Comfort But Be Honest

Focus on helping your child feel safe but be truthful.

If someone is symptomatic:

- ▶ *Dad (or Grandma/Grandpa) feels sick but scientists and doctors think that for most people the virus is like the flu and they'll get better by taking care of themselves.*

If your child is worrying about getting sick?

- ▶ *If you get sick, it doesn't mean you have the coronavirus.*
- ▶ *But I will take you to your Dr. to check to be sure.*
- ▶ *If we have to, we will go to the emergency room and get help.*

Develop a Plan and Share with Your Child

If Your Child Gets a Fever, Cough, or Sore Throat:

- Stay Calm
- Call your doctor or
- Get a telehealth visit - call your insurance provider for information

To Stay Safe:

- Stay home
- Keep other people and pets away from child
- Keep bathroom clean - use regular household cleaners
- Keep house clean (e.g. door knobs, light switches, toys, remotes, phones)
- Have everyone in the home maintain healthy habits (e.g. wash hands)
- Have your child get plenty of rest and drink lots of liquids
- Watch for signs that your child might need more medical help (i.e. breathing problems, sleepiness, trouble drinking liquids) → **Call Your Provider or Go to the ER**

Be Mindful of Misinformation and Blaming

Monitor Intake of Misinformation:

- ▶ Crisis and tension often results in finding someone to blame
- ▶ Avoid stereotyping any one group as responsible for the virus
- ▶ Bullying and negative comments about groups are prevalent on-line
- ▶ Be aware of comments that other adults are having and be prepared to address those comments when they are inconsistent with your values.

Developmentally Appropriate Messages

Early Elementary

- ▶ Brief simple information/limit details
- ▶ Focus on the here and now
- ▶ Limit media exposure

Upper Elementary/Middle School

- ▶ More vocal in asking questions
- ▶ May require more assistance separating fact from rumor (get good info)
- ▶ Monitor media exposure

Upper Middle/High School

- ▶ More adult-like conversations
- ▶ Check their opinions about what they are seeing/reading
- ▶ Able to be referred to information, but also review information for youth w/ challenges

Keep In Mind: If you don't have the answer, say so and use it as an opportunity to look it up.

Summary

- ▶ **How we say things and what we say matters**
- ▶ **Allow time to talk to children and youth about the coronavirus crisis**
- ▶ **Follow their lead - find out what they know and answer questions with accurate information**
- ▶ **Find the balance between:**
 - providing accurate information and monitoring information intake
 - honest messaging about danger and hope for the future
 - practicing safety and reassurance that they are safe

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- ▶ **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Child friendly language for children (See attached)**
- ▶ **Coronavirus (COVID-19): How to Talk to Your Child (See attached)**

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (See Attached)

To get answers to questions, access their hotline or sign up for updates go to NYS Department of Health at:

[https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/form/ask-us-a-question.](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/form/ask-us-a-question)

Thank You

Visit www.ctacny.org to view past trainings, sign-up for updates and event announcements, and to access resources including COVID-19 related resources for mental health providers.

Please send questions to ctac.info@nyu.edu