

# 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

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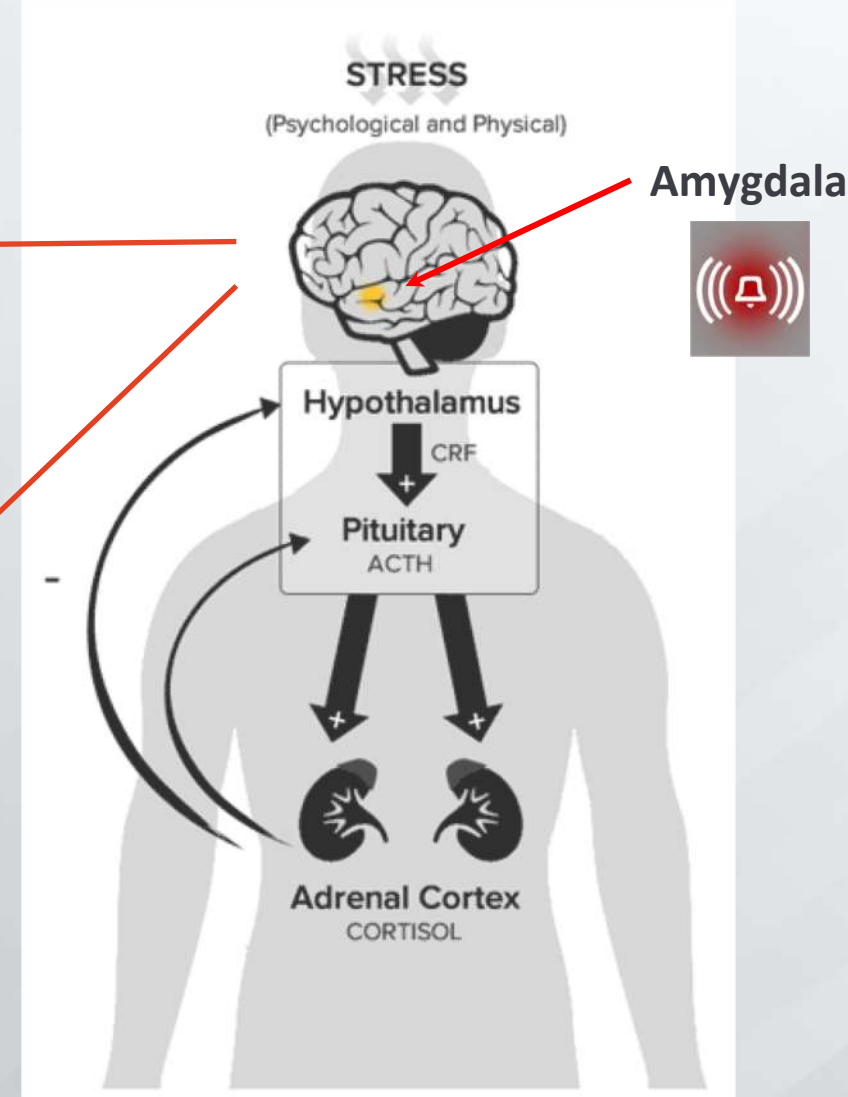
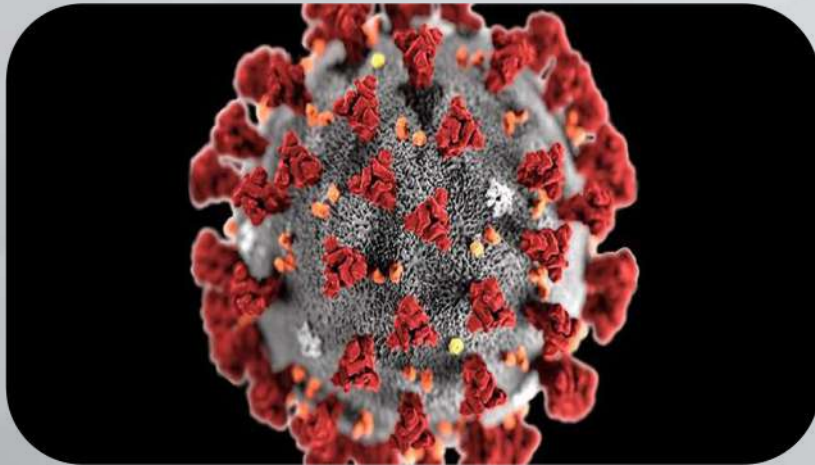
Presenter: Jim Rodriguez, LCSW, PhD

# Agenda

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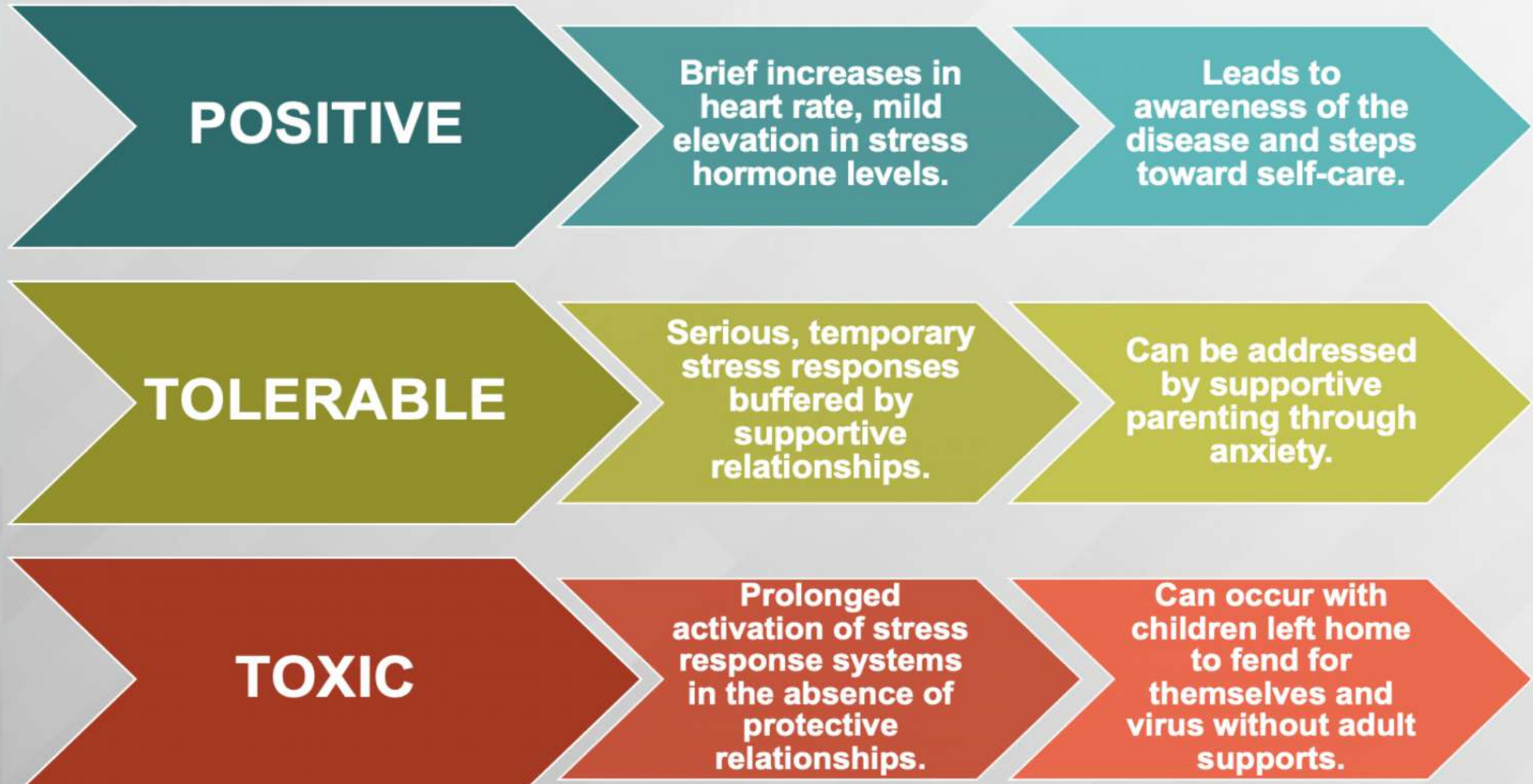
- 1. Discuss COVID-19 as a potential stressor**
- 2. Overview of the human stress response**
- 3. Strategies for responding to children and youth**

# Human Stress Response



# Types of Stress in the Era of COVID-19

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## Responses to High Threat

Fight



- Irritability
- Loss of Temper
- Defensiveness

Flight



- Avoidance
- Anxiety
- Fear

Freeze



- Numbing
- Detachment
- Giving Up Easily

# Risk Factors

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- ▶ **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  
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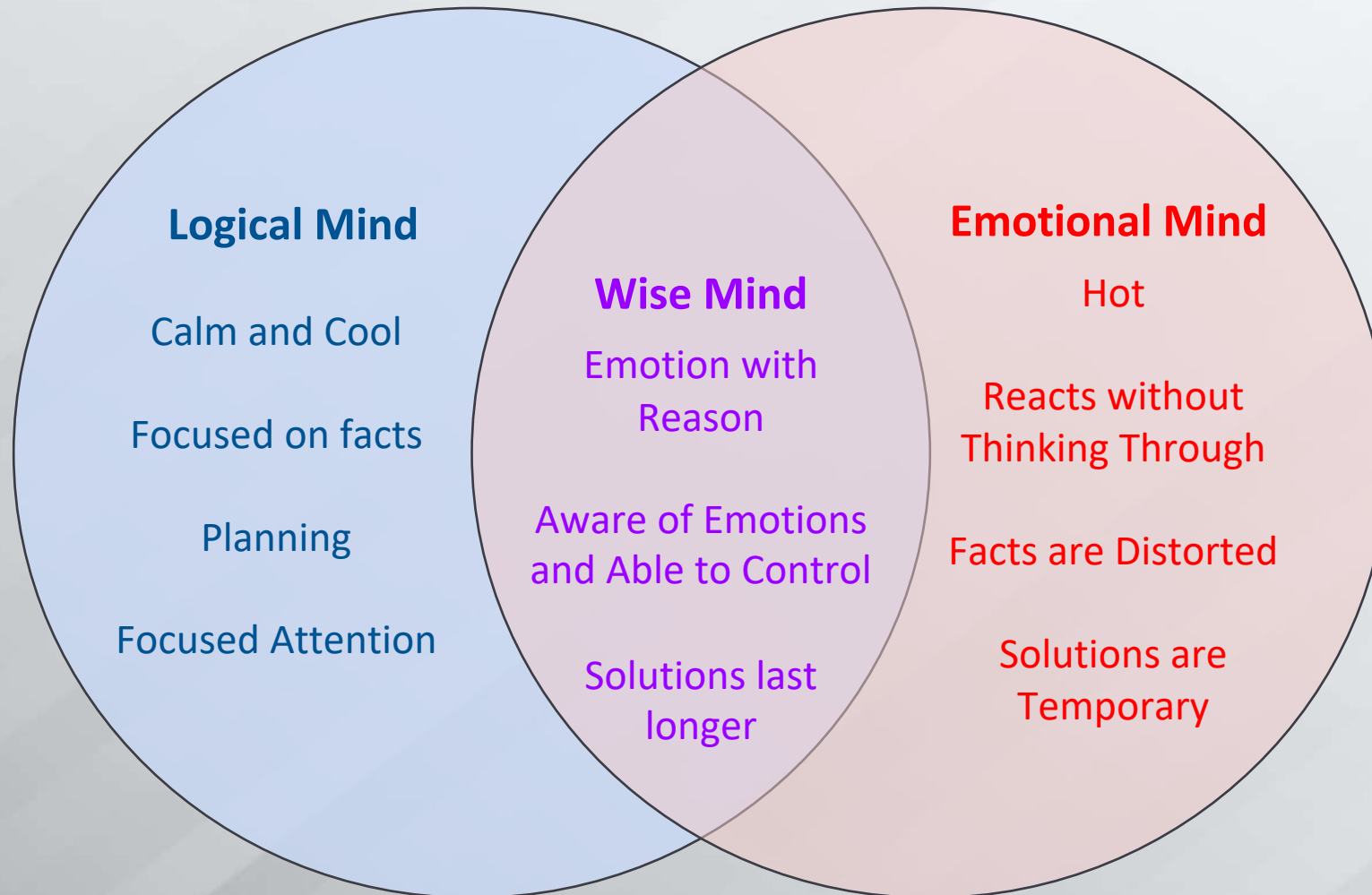


**Family  
Stress**

**Child/Adolescent  
Stress**

# Wise Mind

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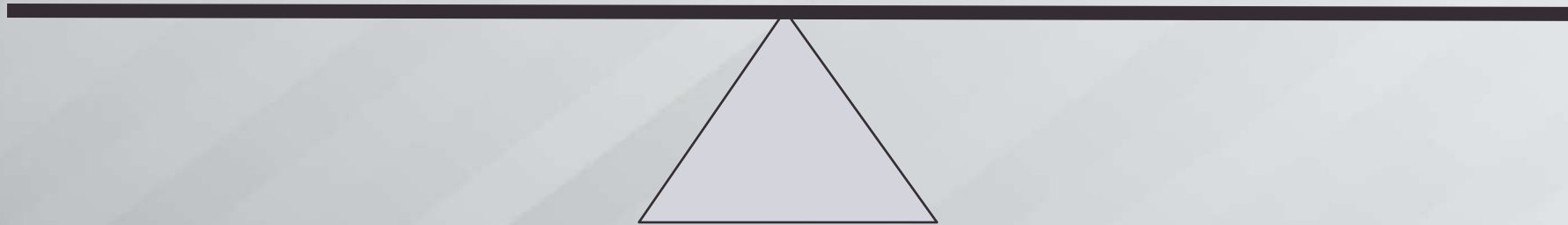




# Balancing Act

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



# Messages can increase anxiety in children and youth

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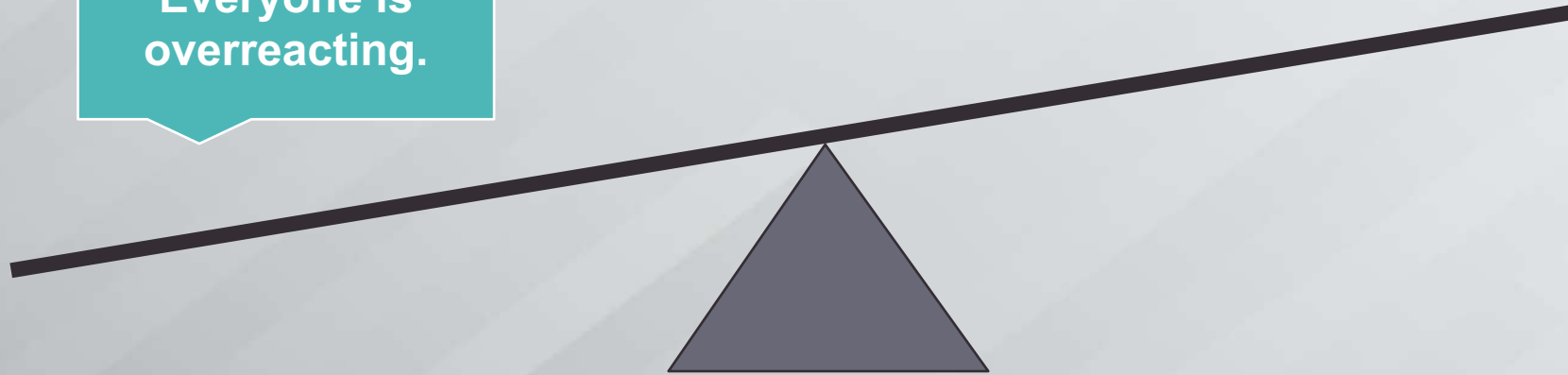


# Messages can minimize the issue for children and youth

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Don't worry,  
everything  
is fine.

Everyone is  
overreacting.



# A Balancing Act

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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

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

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- ▶ **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

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- ▶ **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

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- ▶ **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

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- ▶ **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

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# Examples of Accurate Information

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- ▶ *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

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## 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

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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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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- ▶ **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

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## 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

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Visit [www.ctacny.org](http://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](mailto:ctac.info@nyu.edu)