

Dear Parent/Carer,

By now, your child may have heard about the Coronavirus, whether it's from you, the news or from other children at school. They may have family members who have been quarantined, or they may even know someone who is sick.

Understandably, some of our children have expressed worries and concerns about Coronavirus. Please be assured that here at St. Michael's staff have responded immediately to these concerns with the upmost empathy and understanding.

As you know, St Michael's will close for the majority of children this Friday. (20th March) In light of this, I have put together some tips, a link and evidence based information and advice you may find helpful, particularly around how to talk to your child about the virus and the worries they may have.

In the coming days and weeks, I plan to post more information which I hope you will find useful.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs Ruth Reynolds (Nurture Lead/TIS Practitioner)

Discussing the Coronavirus in General.

1) Don't be afraid to discuss the Coronavirus.

Most children will have already heard about the virus, so you shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make your child worry *more*. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts.

Your goal as parent is to help your child feel informed and get fact-based information that is more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news.

2) Be developmentally appropriate.

Don't share too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.

3) Take your cues from your child.

Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions.

4) Deal with your own anxiety.

When you're feeling most anxious or panicked, that isn't the time to talk to your children about what's happening with the Coronavirus.

If you notice that you are feeling worried or anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions.

5) Be reassuring.

It's helpful to reassure your child about how rare the Coronavirus actually is and that children actually seem to have milder symptoms.

6) Focus on what you're doing to stay safe.

An important way to reassure your child is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Children feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe.

We know that the Coronavirus is transmitted mostly by coughing and touching surfaces. We know from the advice we have been given that thoroughly washing our hands is the primary means of staying healthy. So remind your child that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet.

7) Stick to routine.

Some children don't like uncertainty, so staying rooted in routines is going to be helpful right now, particularly when we close on

Friday. Make sure you are taking care of the basics just like you would during a holiday/school break. We know that structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping children happy and healthy.

8) Keep talking.

Making yourself available to talk and listen is key. Tell your child that you are there for them if they have any questions or need to talk.

Discussing Fears /ideas which may help.

- If your child is under 6 and has not heard about the virus yet, you may not want to bring it up, as it may introduce unnecessary anxiety.
- **Don't dismiss your child's fears.** If your child is telling you that they are worried take their worries seriously. If you simply tell your child "You'll be fine" they might not feel heard. Listen to them and track what they are feeling. You could say something in a calm voice like, ***"That sounds scary, I can see it in your face."***
- **Validate their feelings of fear** by saying things like:
"Thank you for sharing your worries with me."
"I think I understand what you are worried about. What you have told me is....." (Repeat back what they have told you)
"I understand your worries and it's perfectly normal to feel how you are feeling."
"Feeling worried is perfectly normal!"
- **Talk about their worries at an age appropriate level.**
If you are talking about the coronavirus to your young child, say something like, ***"There are lots of different viruses, like when your tummy hurts, or sometimes when you have a cold. Coronavirus is another type of virus."***
Depending on how old your child is and how much they know, you might also say something like, ***"This illness is different than a cold because it's new, but people are trying really hard to***

make sure it doesn't spread, and they treat people who are sick. If you ever have questions, talk to me."

- **Worries about the school being closed.**

Try to frame it as a positive — more time at home where you can spend time together and have fun! — rather than something to fear.

As mentioned above, maintaining some form of routine (especially with school closed) will be important. In addition to keeping a routine, experts recommend making sure your child gets enough exercise. We also know that **exercise and keeping active is one of the best ways to combat feelings of anxiety.**

- **Feelings or experience journals/notebooks.**

Your child may find it helpful to keep a journal or notebook, where they can write or draw their thoughts and experiences. Not only will this help to keep them occupied but it may also serve as an outlet for any worries or questions they may have.

Please find attached a useful NHS link about talking to children about feelings:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/talking-to-children-about-feelings/>

Ruth Reynolds.