## Mayo CYPSC - Talking to Children and Young People about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Advice for Parents/Guardians



Children and young people need factual, age appropriate information about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and concrete instruction about how to avoid spreading it. Without the facts, they often imagine situations far worse than reality. Let the child/young person's questions and their age guide as to how much information you provide.

**Very young children** need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe and that the people they care about are safe. They may ask: *Will I get sick? Will mum or dad get sick? Will granny/grandad get sick?* Reassure them that the Government is working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy.

- Explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with the virus
- Tell them that not everyone will get the virus and that the vast majority who get it recover fully **Older children** may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy.
  - Provide or direct them to where they can find accurate, factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control (see end of document for recommended sources)
  - Children can feel less anxious and more in control when given guidance on what they can do to prevent infection give them this information

Children and young people **look to the adults in their lives to guide them** on how to react to worrying and stressful events. If the adults in their lives seem overly worried, their own anxiety may rise.

- If they are anxious, let them talk about their feelings and guide them in reframing their thoughts and concerns to a more helpful way of thinking
- Give them extra attention and time, to talk about their concerns, fears and questions
- Remember, children and young people do not always talk about their concerns readily watch for cues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do housework, etc.
- It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing and then come back with further questions
- Reassure children and young people that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may be based on rumours and inaccurate information

**Try to avoid** constantly discussing updates on the status of COVID -19, as this can increase anxiety.



















- Try to limit children/young people's access to information on the internet/television/social media that might be upsetting to them
- Remind children/young people that no individual or group is 'responsible' for the virus
- Remind them that they should not make negative comments about others in relation to the virus challenge any negative comments they make or any stereotyping

## Things you can do include:

- Encourage children/young people to continue with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities (see links below), but don't push them if they seem upset or overwhelmed
- Maintain a normal routine as much as possible keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring
- Doing things together as families can really help (board games, etc.) try to get out and about in nature and the fresh air, just remember to maintain proper social distancing

**Look after yourself** - This is a stressful time for everyone – particularly so for parents and those caring for children and young people. There are steps you can take to help this (see additional links below), such as:

- Try to structure your day
- Get some exercise and fresh air

## **Useful Resources/Sources of Information:**

- 1. Health Service Executive (HSE) information page about the Coronavirus
- 2. HSE advice explaining social distancing
- 3. Guidance on minding your mental health during the Coronavirus
- 4. Childrens comic exploring the Coronavirus
- 5. This is a link to a video where the Deputy Chief Medical Officer answered some common questions for RTÉ Junior's News 2Day programme (from a few days ago)
- 6. World Health Organisation (WHO) Myth buster page
- 7. Handwashing storybook guide from Safefood (for small children)
- 8. Handwashing video for children from the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK
- 9. Irish Times news article that provides guidance on home tuition with children, including useful links to online resources

\*This document has been produced by Mayo CYPSC, bringing together guidance documentation from the HSE and other recognised authorities.

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