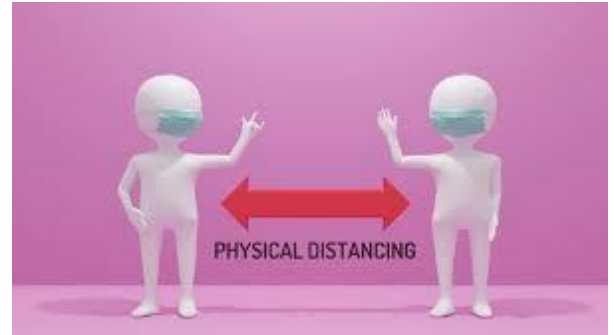


8 WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

While the Coronavirus continues its spread, we are officially in a time of “Physical Distancing”. Physical distancing? Many of us were not familiar with this term until about a month ago – what feels like a lifetime ago. How do we even begin to explain this new way of living to our children?

It's hard enough for adults to fully grasp this physical distancing thing and why it's important, so how do we go about explaining this to our children who keep asking to visit their friends and family.

Here are some quick helpful tips!



(vancouverisaweseom.com, 2020)

1. Let's all work together to fight this.

Many children respond well to change when we personalize things that can be difficult to understand. Children often think of the world in terms such as the good guys, villains, bad guys, and superheroes. Let's start talking about germs as little villains we can't see, and how we are attempting to fight them away. This gives children a mission to latch onto, a larger purpose than just instructions their parents gave them.

Here some example language to use: “we are all working together to try and stop this virus from spreading to other friends, family and community members. The virus can't jump very far so if we stay away from people, then the virus can't jump from person to person and it won't make us all sick.

2. What can we do?

When talking about our “new reality” to our children, it's important that we make everything we say to them clear. We don't want to cause for confusion. When we say “we have to stay away from others right now; we want to add language in such as “we can't hold hands, hug, or have play dates”. But here are some things we can do; FaceTime, Zoom, talk on the phone, write letters or draw pictures and send them in the mail. One take away from this tip is to note all the things we still can do in order to maintain strong connections with our family, community and friends.

Physical distance is not the same as emotional distance, and our children need to understand ways they can still feel close to someone while not being able to see them at the same time. This can be tough for children but with your guidance they can still keep those connections.

3. This may feel different but, there is still A LOT of things that are the same.

When others can relate to how we feel we get some comfort in knowing we are not alone. Same thing goes for our children. We all know how this “new norm” feels strange to us, can you imagine how our children are feeling? Using simple language/terms and acknowledging that everyone is having similar feelings and thoughts can support regulate your child's emotional response.

Some ways you can help your child see that things are still the same are; “we still eat together as a family for dinner, pancakes and bacon for breakfast on Saturday, you still love Paw Patrol, video games, and junk food, you still have to brush your teeth 2x a day and take a shower.” However, most importantly they need to know you still love them and so don't their friends, family, and community who they can't see daily”.

4. You are SAFE!

Just like adults children show their stress and anxiety in different ways such as; tantrums, irritability, defiant, moody, foul language, regression in potty trainings, etc. Just know that this is a way for your child to communicate with you without using words that they are scared, worried or anxious. Some ways for you to manage this and show them they are safe are by giving long hugs, extra attention, and just simply letting them know it's all going to be okay!

5. How are grown-ups working together to help fight this?

You can talk to your children about how experts, scientist, researchers (however you want to word it) are working on finding the right medicines to treat the virus. Doctors, health care workers, therapist, police and supermarket employees are working hard to help us all.

Remember that famous quote “look for the helper in times of crisis” by Mr. Rogers?

6. I'm sorry, this stinks!

Our children will benefit if we validate how much this situation stinks rather than trying to deny or paint this picture for them that doesn't exist. The reality is.... This really does stink! It's stinks they can't see their friends daily, sports are cancelled, they can't have their birthday party, they can't hug their grandparents, or just go to their local park to play.

We also, want our children to see the bright side of this all. We get to do more things together as a family such as arts and crafts. Look at all this extra TV, computer or iPad time you are getting!



(shrimpsaladcircus.com, 2020)



(parents-together.org, 2019)

7. Let's take this one day at a time or even one hour at a time.

Children will and can get overwhelmed if they start to think about having to make this “new norm” adjustments for a long time. It can feel overwhelming to think about how much they miss their grandparents, friends, school, or just their old normal daily routine. Let's try and help our children focus on being in the present moment rather than what's going to happen today or tomorrow.

Just remember, you're not always going to have the “right words” to say and that OKAY! Maybe an extra-long hug or an extra book at night will do the trick.

8. We are all in this together.

Don't you feel good about yourself when you are a part of a community? Well our children feel more secure when they see and understand that they are part of a community. You want to help child understand that it's not just them who have to stay home: “no one is seeing anyone right now”. You should go into detail about who else is social distancing -grandparents, school friends, teachers, and other relatives. You can even explain how other children and families in different countries, states, and cities are also practicing social distancing. “Other children your age in so many different places aren't allowed to see their friends right now or go to the park”.

Reference:

“Explaining Social Distancing to Kids.” *Munson Healthcare*, 3 Apr. 2020, www.munsonhealthcare.org/blog/explaining-social-distancing-to-kids.

Hershberg, Rebecca Schrag. “10 Phrases Parents Can Use to Help Kids Understand Social Distancing.” *Motherly*, 23 Mar. 2020, www.mother.ly/child/help-kids-understand-social-distancing.

