Talking To Your Child During Covid 19

As we face such rapid changes with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID 19, parents want to know how to help their children understand what is going on and provide comfort and reassurance. This can be more of a challenge when you have a child with autism due to concerns such as limited understanding or language skills or increased reactions to stressful information. Below is some information and helpful tips to help you communicate with your child about COVID 19

Talking with your child about coronavirus:

A complex medical or technical explanation is not always necessary to explain the coronavirus to your child. One of the important considerations is your child's language level and ability to understand. Following are some tips to consider when communicating with your child about the situation:

- Remain calm: remember that children react, not only to what you say, but also to how you say it. Remaining calm when speaking to the child as well as when speaking to others will provide reassurance.
- Communicate in a way your child can understand:
  - Use language that is at your child's developmental level
  - In times such as these, less is more: Keep thing simple and concise.
- Keep yourself available to clarify, answer questions, or reassure your child as necessary.
- It may be helpful to reduce screen time that exposes them to information that is often inaccurate and may lead to increased anxiety or stress.

Some specific information to help you talk to your child:

- Provide factual and honest information: share as much as is appropriate for your child. Keep in mind that one would not share some of the information below with infants, young toddlers, or children with language levels that are similar to those of very young children.
  - COVID 19 is short for coronavirus disease 2019
  - It is making many people sick
  - Doctors and scientists say most people will be okay, but some might get very sick
  - Doctors and scientists are still learning about the disease and working hard to help keep everyone healthy and help the sick people get better

- Discuss and model actions or steps being taken to keep everyone safe:
  - School closures
  - Staying home
  - Washing hands: teach them to wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is most important after sneezing, coughing, blowing nose, using the bathroom, before prepping and food, and before meals.
  - Using alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available
  - Not touching face
  - Keeping hands out of mouth
  - Not touching other's hands
  - Not touching surfaces in public (if you have no choice but to take them with you when you must go to places such as a grocery store)

- Discuss what happens when people get sick:
  - For some people it is like when you have the flu
  - People can get a fever, cough, and sometimes have a hard time breathing
  - Just because you get sick, it doesn't mean you have COVID 19
  - If you get sick, we will get you what you need to get better (or similar phrase)