Children look to adults for guidance about how to react to stress. The COVID-19 crisis will be less upsetting to kids when parents model calm problem solving, flexibility, and compassion.

When you’re talking to your children about COVID-19, let them lead the discussion. Answer their questions honestly, using age appropriate terms and explanations. Remember, if they ask you something, it means they’ve been thinking about it. Validate their thoughts.

With younger kids, use open-ended questions, ask what they’ve heard or know. If you are co-parenting, be sure your messaging is consistent.

Monitor your child’s mental health just as you’d monitor their physical health. Be aware of behavioral or emotional changes lasting more than 2 weeks as intervention may be appropriate. Also be on the lookout for anxiety when you are preparing to go to work, and/or returning home. Address children’s concerns and behaviors in real time whenever possible. Provide support, and create a safe space for them to verbalize feelings—AND for you to listen.

**Emotional Red Flags**

**Preschoolers:** Regressive behavior, (thumb sucking, bedwetting, fear of dark) clinging to parents, sleep and appetite disturbances

**Elementary Schoolers:** Irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, social withdrawal

**Adolescents:** Sleeping/eating disturbances, agitation, physical complaints, increase in conflicts with parents