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Eskenazi Health Offers Advice on Coping with Stress Associated with COVID-19

Worldwide pandemic causes sorrow and fear for adults and children alike

Indianapolis, March, 13, 2020 – Dr. W. Graham Carlos, chief of Internal Medicine at Eskenazi Health, shares his thoughts on how adults may best deal with the stress and fear resulting from the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, and how parents may speak with and educate their children about the virus.

The bottom line message I want to share to everyone is: prepare but don't panic.

- Prepare to have your life altered for the next couple weeks.
- Prepare food as you need it.
- Prepare to not go out to public places
- Prepare to keep up with the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Department.

There is no need to panic.

We are taking every measure that we can as a hospital, a health system and as a community to reduce the burden of this disease.

This may look different for everybody as we ask our communities to practice social distancing, so if you can avoid going to work and if you can work from home, please do. This doesn't mean you should avoid work and then go to a social occasion. Use this as an opportunity to do things like catch up on work and also enjoy some binge watching to relieve stress at home.

For people who are really anxious, it may be good to stay busy and not just watch the news all day. Working on a hobby or a craft, exercising at home or reading a good book may be helpful.

Some adults will become really anxious and will need to call for some medical help. During times like this when we've had enormous stress in our country, and I think back to 9/11 when there were many people during that time and afterwards dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and generalized anxiety disorder, so we may see things like that happen again.

Advice for parents in speaking to children about COVID-19

Expect your children to be anxious. They're seeing things on the news and hearing things from their friends that make them worry, not only about their own health, but also about the health of the people they love.

Kids of health care workers are particularly prone to these worries because they know their moms and dads are going to places where there may be sick people. They may see their parents come home and not want to hug their kids for fear that they may transmit the virus.

Decisions on how to talk and interact, and counsel kids are best left up to individual parents who know their children best. Kids may be very interested in the science behind this and wanting to learn more about the biological aspects of health and disease, viral transmission and those sorts of things, and I think you should fan those flames and encourage your kids to learn more.

Other children may be having real anxiety issues, and those kids you'll want to keep away from the news media and places like social media where there's been a lot that could worsen their stress and anxiety levels.

For some kids who already struggle with anxiety, this may be a good time to check with your medical professional for a change in medications, or at least maybe a counseling visit to discuss these issues because they are pretty scary for children and adults.

You'll also want to meet kids where they're at when you talk with them, which means asking them questions: What have you heard about the coronavirus? What are your friends saying about the coronavirus? How do you feel personally and what are you most worried about? These are opportunities to teach your children. Certainly you'll want to correct misinformation and you'll want to give them accurate information, things that will reassure them.

You might want to remind kids that one of the best things they can do and we can do as a family is to socially distance ourselves. For some kids this might mean they're upset because they are not going to school and seeing their friends, or a spring break vacation trip is canceled. It's an opportunity to discuss why we do things in life for other people to prevent the spread of the disease to others like the elderly.

I would also say, don't just have one conversation tonight, but make this a daily check-in because they might see and hear something today that reassures them and then catch a news clip tomorrow that suddenly terrifies them. While kids are home from school during these times, I think routine regular check-ins as a family are a good idea. Let kids air out what they're thinking, what they're worried about and what they're hearing, and take it from there.

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care campus. Eskenazi Health has been named one of Becker's Hospital Review's "150 Top Places to Work in Healthcare" for the past four consecutive years.