



It can be confusing to determine how much (or how little) to share with your kiddos during times of uncertainty. As a parent, we want to provide support and reduce anxiety. However, with fast-paced global challenges, such as COVID-19, this can be incredibly difficult. Eagle Valley Behavioral Health, an outreach of Vail Health, has identified some strategies specific to children that can be useful during this period.

**Limit children's exposure to media.** It is always important to monitor what a child is viewing through media channels. However, during times of global distress, this becomes increasingly important. Media is often overwhelming for adults; however, children may lack the cognitive understanding to fully comprehend the content of the news, leading to increased anxiety, "what-if" thinking, panic, and agitation.

**Provide an open space.** Often parents feel that they must have all the answers when talking with their children. However, it is most important to provide an open and trusting space to talk. Perhaps beginning a conversation with, "You may have heard some things about an illness that is going around, coronavirus. What type of things have you heard?" Having regular, open conversations about feelings, fears, and thoughts is linked with psychological wellness in children. Remember, it is ok to not have all the answers. It is also never too early to begin these conversations.

**Maintain a schedule.** Closures, isolation, and quarantine may impact your family's daily routine. However, it is useful to attempt to maintain normal routines and schedules, even if this means doing so within your home. Utilize technology to encourage peer interactions and social support (for adults and children). Creating a sense of routine and structure can increase a child's sense of internal control and comfort.

**Understand typical responses.** We need to remember that with the level of stress and uncertainty, the majority of people (children or adults) will have some level of a stress response. In young children this can include nightmares, regression of previously mastered skills (bedwetting/accidents), increased separation anxiety, increased acting out (behaviors/tantrums), or physical symptoms (bellyaches/headaches). Older children may demonstrate increased moodiness, sleep difficulties, anxiety about missing social support, fear of social rejection, and/or social withdrawal. If you become concerned about yourself or your children, seek help. Several providers in our community are able to provide telehealth support through HIPAA compliant video conferencing options. The EVBH Therapist Finder website is an excellent resource to identify additional behavioral health support for your family. Visit [www.eaglevalleybh.org](http://www.eaglevalleybh.org) for more information.

It is important for parents and caregivers to reassure children and loved ones that we have plans to manage the current situation and keep them safe. *Dr. Casey Wolfington is a licensed*



*psychologist and the community behavioral health director with Eagle Valley Behavioral Health. She has been providing services in the community for more than 12 years.*