

When the Future is Unclear

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Hello my lovelies! Today's post is going to be short and sweet. We're all living in a world that feels pretty uncertain and we're having to make up a lot as we go. If we're having trouble adjusting as adults, just think about how tough it might be for your kids. They have a lot less control over their world and that sometimes makes it harder for them to understand everything that's going on in the world.

If you're like most parents, you've probably found yourself fielding a lot of questions about why things are the way they are and when they're going to "get back to normal." I'm guessing you've handled many questions well and have been able to give your kids answers.

But what happens when you don't know the answer? When your kids ask if/when they're going back to school, when they'll be able to be with their friends again, when they'll be able to return to sports/activities that have been cancelled or changed, or when the family vacation will happen, you may not be able to give them an answer. What about when they ask you if they'll get sick like so many other people or whether the things they see/hear on the news will happen to them or their loved ones?



First things first, don't panic!!

Remind yourself that, realistically, it's not possible for you to be able to answer all your kids' what if/why/when/how questions. So the good news is that you've already had experience with this. Kids are really good at asking questions we don't know the answers to or things we aren't ready or aren't sure how to talk about.

Here are some other tips for talking to your kids when things are uncertain:

1. **Be honest** – Don't try to make something up because you think it will make your kids feel better/worry less. Kids know when we're not being honest with them or when we're holding something back. If you're going to answer their questions, be honest with your answers, even if the answer is that you're not sure.
2. **Be developmentally appropriate** – Give your kids the information they can handle at their developmental level. Explain things in a way that helps them grasp the important information without overloading them with details they either don't need or won't fully understand. If you're not sure how to talk to them about a particular subject, it's okay to tell them you need to look up some information and then you'll talk with them about it later. But remember, if you say you're going to talk to them about it later, you have to follow through!
3. **Be mindful of timing** – Think about when your kids need particular information. If they're asking about something months in advance, you don't need to give them any definite answers right now. You can let them know that it's too soon to know or that you have to wait a few weeks/months before you'll have the answer to that question. Your kids may not like this response, but it's the honest one and it keeps you from providing misinformation or promising something that won't happen. Also, sometimes kids don't even need the information until closer to the event, particularly if it's something that will cause them increased anxiety.
4. **Only express certainty when you're certain** – Don't make promises you aren't sure you can keep. Many of the questions your kids have are about things that are out of your control, so you can't be certain about how those things will go (e.g., plans for returning to school). Sometimes kids are very persistent and keep asking until you tell them what they want to hear. Beware of this- it's a trap! If you put something out there as a done deal, your kids will expect it to happen. If it doesn't, trust will be damaged and you'll be digging yourself out of a hole with your kids. If persistent questioning happens, this may signal that it's time to have a

direct conversation with your kids about dealing with uncertainty and coping with the associated anxiety.

5. **Show empathy** – Remind yourself that it’s difficult for kids to manage uncertainty. Just like you struggle when things are up in the air, so do they. Allow them space to talk about their anxiety/frustration/disappointment/etc. about the fact that life is unsettled right now and it’s unclear what the future holds.
6. **Focus on the present** – Talking about the future is necessary, but we have to live in the present. This is especially important when there is so much turmoil in the world. Talk with your kids about their concerns, then help them refocus on the present moment. Let them know that they are safe and well. Talk with them about plans and safeguards you have in place. Help them use coping skills in the moment when worries about the future become overwhelming.

Most importantly, it’s okay to say “I don’t know.” That’s a perfectly acceptable answer when you truly don’t know. Then, talk with your kids about your plans for either figuring out the answers or coping with the stress of “wait and see.” It can be tough not to have all the answers, but your kids will benefit from watching how you use positive coping skills and from talking with you about how to manage uncertainty.