

Strategies to assist parents manage children's worries over the H1N1 flu (swine flu)

Acknowledging children's concerns and reinforcing children's coping are two key strategies to assist parents in managing their children's worries over the H1N1 flu (swine flu), reports the Australian Psychological Society (APS).

Professor Bob Montgomery, President of the APS says, "At this stage, many children are aware of the threat of the flu outbreak from conversations amongst peers, the local community, from overhearing adult conversations, or from daily updates in the media. Parents have an important role to play not only in helping their children to understand and follow the Government health warnings and advice, but also to help calm their children by acknowledging their concerns and by reinforcing their children's coping. Worries and anxieties about threats such as swine flu can become difficult for children of all ages to deal with".

➤ **Acknowledging children's concerns**

Some simple steps for parents include:

- Acknowledging children's concerns and worries. Given the current worldwide attention and Australia wide concerns over the H1N1 flu, it is understandable that children are anxious about what is taking place and how it might affect them.
- Listening closely to children's concerns. Are they looking for factual information, or are the questions expressing anxiety?
- Responding to any obvious items of misinformation that they have picked up and help them to make sense of information or sort out truth from fiction. It can be very helpful to provide facts in these circumstances.
- Reinforcing the recommended government health practices to reduce the likelihood of contracting swine flu.
- Where children appear anxious and to be seeking assurance, providing comfort can help to allay distress.

➤ **Supporting children's coping**

Some simple steps for parents include:

- Being conscious of the presence of children when discussing swine flu with other adults. It is a good idea not to let children overhear adult conversations about worrying things if they cannot join in at their own age or stage of development. Be aware, too, of your own levels of anxiety around the children. Children often take their cues for how they feel and behave from the people around them.
- It can be helpful to limit how much your children are being exposed to media stories about swine flu.
- If a family member does become infected, take time to develop a plan for dealing with the ill family member and review this with your children.
- Focusing on maintaining children's routines and schedules can support children's adaptive coping. For example, keeping to routines such as mealtimes, extra-curricular activities, regular homework activities and bedtime rituals can be helpful.

The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 17,500 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.

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