

Dear DCA Families -

As news and information is coming in at a steady stream of awful, I wanted to give you some thoughts on how to talk to your children about the pandemic and an invitation to this week's upper school podcast. I am not an expert on the Covid-19 virus by any stretch; I am simply a parent, like you, that desires deeply to honor God with the shepherding of the hearts that are trampling through my home. I am going to lay out tips that I hope will be a prayerful guide to give you direction. This is not a complete list as I feel Mike and I are daily praying for the wisdom we need to address the specific needs of our children. Although imperfect in our parental endeavors this season, I pray we can be found faithful.

- **Address your own anxiety daily**- Our kids are sponges to what they see and feel. God has hard wired them to be led by us. No matter what their perceived stress level, I assure you that they take in, first and foremost, how you are responding to this pandemic. You are not just teaching math and science right now; you are teaching them how to respond to fear and uncertainty. That is not an invitation to fake it until you make it, but God asked Cain in Genesis 5:6-8 to do the right thing and his countenance would be lifted up. Allow that to sink in. From the lips of God, it is ok to act contrary to how you feel with a heartfelt desire to please and trust Him. As our actions demonstrate obedience to the commands of God, we trust that our feelings will find their way into agreement. I can think of no greater way to handle my daily fears than to bring them before the Father in constant prayer. In fact, this is Paul's admonition in Phil 4:6-8. We are encouraged to see worry as the wrong direction, but rather, with every anxious thought we are to pray and reaffirm our trust in God. Teach your children with every anxious thought to bring those feelings straight to God. *When I am afraid, I will trust in God.* Psalm 56:3

If fear is nipping at your heels, I encourage you to sink into Matthew 6, a commentary straight from the lips of Jesus on worry. Last week I had the sum total of a bad day. No way around it. My 15-year-old, Kamden, found me in my room in my bed. He asked, "Mom what is wrong?" as I am not usually in bed early. I said, "This has just been a bad day." His response still brings tears as I type this. He said, "Mom, can I pray for you?" His immediate response and precious prayer reminded me that they are forever watching what we do when our heart is heavy. May we guide them well in this season.

- **Know your child**- The needs of our children can vary based on personality. We have a child who is living his best life, a true hermit, unaffected by the virus and has found the lack of activity a blessing. He is not afraid and asks no questions about the virus or its impact. We have another child, an extrovert on steroids, that is angry at the world, the government, and anyone that would have the audacity to ask him to social distance from what gives him life. He has needed longer talks, more processing, the ability to grieve and not rush to gratitude. The amount of information he needs about the virus and its effects on him has required more information, not less, and more scriptural navigation on how we handle hardship. Wisdom allows us the blessing of loving our children individually and asking God for grace to navigate all hearts with what is best for the child. Ask God to show you the unique need for each child.

- **How to interact with your child** - If you have younger children, it is imperative that you take your cues from your child. Try not to answer questions that they aren't asking! Little hearts are easily overwhelmed with big information. Here are a few counseling specifics that could help with young children.
 1. **Handling questions** –

Do not ask a lot of questions to young hearts as it can create increased fear.

Do invite questions and keep those communication lines open. Tell them that they have permission to ask you anything and if you don't have an answer, you will research that and get back to them. Remember you have a greater goal to protect young hearts from the onslaught of information so make sure that the news is not on when they are around. Media has no fear filter. Make sure that your emotions are in check when you talk about the Covid virus, using non emotional language as much as possible.
 2. **It is ok to say, "I don't know."**

There are helpful truths to articulate that we do know can comfort young hearts and provide direction for their thoughts. We do know that they will most likely not get sick. The virus is not impacting younger children. Many who get sick are getting well. We live in a country that is blessed with help for crises and is doing a great job tending to its own. Teaching them the basics of hand washing, coughing and sneezing into their sleeve, and social distancing are powerful tools of love and a way to give them an activity that they **can do** to love others well.
 3. **Uncertainty increases anxiety in children so the younger the child the greater the need for routine.**

It might help you to see it as a gift to their young souls...maybe not yours. Bedtime and mealtime routines are essential. When I walked through cancer 6 years ago my children were small, and we worked very hard to maintain as close a normal routine as we could. It was a season of hardship, but I can tell you that their reflections are not as difficult as mine and I believe that the routine of daily life ministered comfort and consistency to their taxed hearts. So as difficult as routine may be in this season, strive to see routine as a way to comfort and minister to young hearts.
- **Here are a few helps for older children.**
 1. **Give space in your home for your teen to grieve the losses they are experiencing.** The greatest number of Psalms we have in our Bible are called lament psalms. They are written under Holy Spirit inspiration and included in the inspired word of God. Permission is granted by God to a grieving soul to lament the difficulty of loss, and to wrestle out loud the hurt and pain of living in this broken world. There are usually lifts by the end of most of the lament Psalms, as the writer wrestles and then reaffirms his trust in God. But there are actually two

Psalms, 39 and 88, that end in utter darkness. I have come to love them as I age, for in them I find a God who gives permission to grieve and wrestle out loud with the hardships of life, especially when it feels unfair. As parents, we should follow God's example and give the same permission. While I am an advocate of counting your blessings and would be the first to tell you we have much to be grateful for, I do not believe God asks us to allow gratitude to drown out our feelings of grief. If we believe that sorrow and joy flowed in equal measure at the cross that Jesus bore, then we can also believe that grief and gratefulness are not mutually exclusive, they are disciplines that can coexist. Give your teen permission to talk about what they are losing. Wrestle with them through giving up sports, concerts, performances, face to face friendships that they worked hard for. Make room for misplaced emotions, an occasional emotional outburst that seems uncharacteristic, trusting that the grace you give them gives room to breathe through their losses, and an eventual opportunity to reaffirm their trust in God.

2. **Do not feel the need to make things better for your child right now.** If you are like me, you may want to offer circumstantial helps to alleviate the frustration our kids are walking through. I am raising a senior who just started his last baseball district season. I cannot teach, cook, clean or listen well enough to make the grieving better. I can trust that God is on the throne, and He will walk with us through every ounce of the difficulty. Use this opportunity when inadequate feelings arise to remember that you are not called to make it better. You are called to point them to the one who will lead them through this, and every trial.
3. **Talk openly about expectations.** Teens do not realize that they have already developed many expectations. Hardship and loss allow us to see them more clearly. We can face trouble well if we can identify what false expectations we hold. Over and over Jesus told his disciples that in this world we would know trouble, John 16:33. Taking a look at our expectations does not negate grief but allows us to trace our frustrations back to the source. Make sure you navigate these conversations letting them know that you, too, struggle with expectations.
4. **Listen to the podcast this week as a family.** Three times Jesus pleaded with God for another way, but he ended those pleas with an affirmation of His trust in His Father's perfect plan. This podcast by Tim Keller is an excellent resource on godly lament and Jesus' model of grief.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulmaUtbayGY&t=1199s>
5. **Utilize the time-** Instead of getting discouraged or distracted during this prolonged quarantine, pray that God would give you eyes to see a unique opportunity to slow your normal rhythm, plan for spiritual conversations that can allow insight into your child's spiritual condition and help you focus your family's heart on God.

We remain here for you,

Mike and Kerry Scheer
Chaplain and Counselor