



Keeping children informed and connected at this challenging time.

By Wilson McCaskill

In these complex and challenging times, we would be wise to recognise that one way children soothe themselves is to appear disinterested in the cause of their anxiety and stress. Unfortunately this feigned disinterest does not stop their minds going into overload trying to make sense of the sudden changes to home, school and the world order. Children are defined by their times more than any other influencing factor and right now the times are unsettling and whether they show it or not our children will be inwardly unsettled.

So, be wise and talk about what is going on. Talk calmly but don't be dismissive of the big events happening around us. By being dismissive (*Don't worry about it, everything's fine*) you will only convince your children that you are disconnected from reality and that is certainly not comforting.

They need to know how you are feeling and what you are doing to stay calm and steady. They need to know what worries you the most and how you are dealing with those worries. They need to know you are optimistic and where that optimism comes from. They need to know there is difference between circumstances changing and people changing. And they need to know that all the people who are important to them will still be there and be the same people they always were before things changed so quickly.

They will be home with you for quite some time and as things (*not the people that are important to them*) change, you need to find ways to help them feel they are of real value and worth in difficult times.

They will be sensing that the value and worth of many things is changing and this can be unnerving. So, find ways for them to help out in the home - ways for them to make a meaningful contribution because contributing leads to belonging and belonging gives you security and emotional stability.

Don't underestimate how firm you may have to be to get them to contribute, but think of it as lifesaving medicine and insist they help to wash the car, sweep the driveway, fold the linen, paint the wall, cook a meal, clean the windows, talk to their Nana, plant some flowers and so many other things they can do even if they don't do them particularly well. And when they do, thank them for contributing to the family and tell them you want them to keep it up because it helps and brings you all together.

Remember they are children and they may have little idea of what they need right now because one thing is sure; it is often very difficult to put your finger on the cause of your worry and that makes pretending you're not worried a pretty good strategy if you're a kid.

Be wise and hang onto the belief that contributing is the key to belonging and all the positive benefits that come with it. Be a family and talk openly but age appropriately about what is going on and remember to walk around with the hint of a smile on your face. Kids get it...no matter how tough, strange or difficult things are, if the big people are smiling then everything is likely going to be alright.