I've had more than a dozen difficult conversations with my kids by now. I've explained what the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is, I've explained why they have to stay home and why they can't go to their school or the playground. I've even explained why we can only see Grandma on FaceTime and why we need to wash our hands and wear face masks and stand far away from other people at the park.

When Kids Ask Tough Coronavirus Questions, Try This Psychiatrist-Approved 5-Step "Script"
"Not answering their questions fully means kids will be left to fill in the blanks on their own."

But, for my family and many like mine, the questions just keep on coming. And, as time goes on, parents have understandably gotten more lax with their answers. Dr. Yamalis Diaz, a child psychiatrist and clinical assistant professor at the Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, has observed that we say things like "don't worry about it" in an attempt to quickly dismiss concerns.

"These statements close the conversation down because they think they are protecting their kids from information they deem to be 'too much,'" she told POPSUGAR. "However, not talking about it at all or not answering their questions fully means kids will be left to fill in the blanks on their own."

Dr. Diaz believes that following a good "script," or formula, can help parents continue to engage with kids effectively. Here's her five-step script for answering complex questions with kids:

Reflect and validate. It's vital to start the conversation by simply empathizing with what has been hard for the child.

Answer honestly. Parents should do their best to give honest answers, ideally supported by facts. This might mean that a parent has to say, "I don't know the answer, but I will look it up and get back to you." That's OK as long as the parent follows through in a timely fashion and continues through the next steps of the script.

Invite additional questions. The previous feedback may be sufficient, but it might open up a door to more curiosities. If that's the case, encourage your child to ask more questions, and repeat the first few steps until you've reached a point of resolution. Then, Dr. Diaz said, it doesn't hurt to reflect and validate once more.

Reassure. This is one of the most important steps in calming a child's anxieties - but, Dr. Diaz has seen parents often "rush to the reassurance" step. Again, this merely serves to shut down the conversation. "It may feel temporarily nice, but it kind of leaves kids feeling like the emotion they're feeling is getting overstepped. Also, it may not directly answer the question."

Offer solutions. This is the time when parents should engage their kids in "next steps" or practical, positive coping skills.

To illustrate Dr. Diaz's five-step script in action, I gave her a handful of real-life questions my children have asked me and my husband over the past few months. She mapped out how she'd answer them and encourages parents to use these examples as a guide with their own kids.

"When can I see my friends again?"

"Oh, honey, I know it's hard not to be able to see your friends [**reflect and validate**]. Unfortunately, we don't know when that will be because we have to wait for the doctors to help everyone who has the coronavirus, and we have to stay home to make sure more people don't get sick [**answer honestly**]. I know that's probably a disappointing answer, huh [**reflect and validate, continued**]? I bet it'll be so great when you and your friends can get together again [**reassure**]. Would you like to set up a FaceTime call with your friends so you can say hi [**offer solutions**]?"

"Are people going to die?"

"I can see you're really worried about the coronavirus making people sick [**reflect and validate**]. The truth is that the coronavirus can make people very sick and, yes, some people could get sick enough to die. But there are hundreds of doctors and scientists working on finding a medicine that could help [**answer honestly**]. Do you have other questions about this that you're worrying about [**invite additional questions**]? I'm so glad you told me what was making you feel worried. So now you know that we have all those people working on making the medicine people need [**reassure**]. In the meantime, we can do our part by washing our hands and staying inside as much as possible [**offer solutions**]."

"Why can't I go on the playground? It's right there!"

"Ugh, I know it's so annoying that you can't go to the playground when it's right across the street [**reflect and validate**]! But we can't go to the park because the rule is that we have to stay home and keep our hands clean to avoid getting the germs that could make us sick [**answer honestly**]. I'd really love to be able to go to the park with you, so I'm pretty disappointed, too [**reflect and validate, continued**]. I'll tell you what, when we're allowed to go to the park again, we'll have a special day at the playground together [**reassure**]. For now, can we find something else to do together inside? Maybe we can make our own version of a playground out of the couch cushions [**offer solutions**]?"

"Do I have to do schoolwork at home still?"

"Listen, I know this isn't the way you wish school was like these days [**reflect and validate**]. However, we aren't allowed to go to the school building with your teacher and

classmates right now because we are all being asked to stay home to keep everyone safe [**answer honestly**]. What about homeschooling do you dislike [**invite additional questions**]? Eventually, school will open back up, and you'll get to go back to seeing your friends and having recess and circle time like you used to [**reassure**]. Let's try this new computer program your teacher recommended that might be similar to the way she does it in school [**offer solutions**]."

https://www.msn.com/en-us/Lifestyle/parenting/when-kids-ask-tough-coronavirus-questions-try-this-psychiatrist-approved-5-step-script/ar-BB13KNFy?fbclid=IwAR3W1Km6GHJSUiiQdeTtB0IawGDhKs9wdZq_yi4HYmGpx2dh32hgqk-vBAs