How to talk to the people we serve about the Coronavirus (COVID-19):

1. **Remain calm** when explaining this information. If we become emotional or reactive, people will feel less safe and reassured.
2. **Be prepared**. Make sure you understand the facts about COVID-19.
3. **Explore what the person already knows.** “What have you heard about Coronavirus?” It’s possible that they heard people at work, in the community, their family, or even staff discussing the virus. Keep in mind there is a lot of misinformation and rumors going around, so the person may be worried about something that isn’t true. It’s also possible that the person does not know anything about the virus and needs you to explain from the beginning.
4. **Follow the person’s lead**. If they are curious or anxious about the topic they may want to discuss it more. For others, they may not be worried or interested. Remind the person that if they have questions, they are welcome to ask.
5. **Know your audience**. If the person is anxious, refrain from discussing the death rate of the virus. If the person is skeptical or does not believe the news, be honest about the seriousness of the virus. Also be aware discussions with other staff could potentially be overheard.
6. **Define words or give examples** when explaining information and concepts that are complex or technical.
7. **Make sure the person feels safe**. Remind them that staff are here to help them no matter what. The person can talk to staff anytime they are feeling anxious.
8. **Normalize** any anxiety around the virus. It is normal to feel nervous and most people feel some level of anxiety about catching the Coronavirus or the effects of the virus on others/society.
9. **What is it?** Explain that the Coronavirus /COVID-19 is a new illness going around (you may need to explain that the Coronavirus is like a flu). You can list symptoms for the person (fever, cough, shortness of breath). Read more about the virus at cdc.gov
10. **How do people catch it?** Explain that people can catch the virus from coming into contact with people who are ill (if someone that is sick coughs/or sneezes, the “respiratory droplets” can go into another person’s nose or mouth and make them sick)
11. **What should we do?** It’s important that people do not spread germs (you may need to explain spreading germs, which happens from coughing, sneezing, saliva, mucus, not washing hands, etc.). Explain that getting sick isn’t fun for anyone, so hygiene is important. You may need to explain that good hygiene means washing hands often (especially when using tissues) and covering your coughs and sneezes into your elbow (and not on your hands or into the air). Staff may need to give more reminders to wash hands or avoid greetings that involve touch.
12. **Social Distancing** is another important thing we can do to reduce our chances of catching or passing on the virus. If we keep our distance from others and mainly stay at home, we are less likely to catch it or make others sick. We also want to avoid handshakes and hugs at this time. Reminders are helpful for everyone (staff included!)
13. **Explain how it will impact the person’s life.** Help the person prepare for the changes. If the person is used to a routine or activity, they may have a hard time adjusting. You may need to explain that it’s better to avoid \_\_\_\_ for now. Explain why we cannot have families and friends visit, as we want to ensure they and we stay safe right now.
14. **If a staff or housemate is sick or goes to hospital-** that person not being there might frighten them, or they may think they have the virus. Educating and giving information about universal precautions and taking good care of ourselves is important and our best defense.
15. **For many, rescheduling the activity to a later date is helpful.** It will be hard to predict a specific date with so much uncertainty. Be aware that this news may make the person upset. Follow the behavior support plan for direction on how to respond.
16. **Encourage phone/video calls.** If a person has older family, they are worried about at this time, they may find comfort in calling them to make sure their loved one is alright. Routine contact with friends and family is helpful during this time. Encourage facetime if possible.
17. **Limit news.** It’s good to be informed but leaving the news on TV for hours can create a more stressful environment. Unless it is the person’s choice, a distraction may be better (such as an enjoyable movie).
18. **Be honest.** If you don’t know the answer to the question about the virus, tell the person you are not sure, but you can find out. Reach out to management or a nurse for an accurate answer, or check a factual online source such as the Centers for Disease Control website (cdc.gov)
19. **This too shall pass.** Explain that the precautions being taken are temporary (meaning that they will not last forever). People who are anxious will need this reminder. Explain that difficult times are a normal part of life, but we will get past this. Many people with the Coronavirus have recovered, and the virus will start to go away over time.