

THINK PYNK: Expert Corner with Speech and Language Pathologist Cherina Williams M.Ed., CCC-SLP

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Meet *Cherina Williams*, graduate of Clark-Atlanta University, wife, mother of two and one of the COOLEST Speech Pathologists on the planet!!! Cherina's practice, I HEART SPEECH THERAPY serves the birth to age 3 population as well as school-age children. Their mission is to provide outstanding services specifically tailored to clients' needs giving them communication skills that can be carried over into daily living. Cherina and her staff are dedicated to providing evidence-based practices to carry out these principles. Currently, she offers child evaluations, weekly sessions and consultation services.

We got a chance to catch up with Cherina to ask her advice on the current COVID19 Pandemic and how we communicate this to our children.

Cherina, in the midst of this Covid-19 crisis, many parents and children's daily routine have changed? Walk us through some effective ways parents can explain this pandemic to their children?

That's a great question! Different age levels require different ways to send the same information.

For our younger audiences, you may find yourself using an analogy that is visually relatable to explain germs, virus and COVID-19. For middle and high schoolers, you may find yourself explaining that no one is expendable (simply put, "No, you may not go hang out with your friends!")

Preschoolers:

I like to use the description of thinking of COVID-19 as a glue that goes from place to place. The word "glue" can be interchanged with "germ."

What is also great about this analogy is that you can use paper and glue to provide a physical model. It doesn't hurt to teach a little science!

“Covid-19 is spread by our germs. Think of it like a glue. Imagine getting glue all over your hands and touching things you normally touch...your face, other people, door knobs, swings and books. Even worse, other people touch the things we touch, which also gets our glue on them. Some people touch our glue and nothing happens after they wash their hands. For other people who forget to wash their hands before touching their face, the glue gets into their body and attaches to the lungs, which is what we need to breathe and it takes longer for the glue to go away. There are others who are exposed to the glue and it makes their breathing stop.

We want to stay home to stop any more spreading of the glue to our friends and families. We want this to go away, but the only way it will end is by staying home, washing our hands regularly for 20-seconds and seeing people we love outside of home later. We want to keep everyone safe and we don't want any contact with the glue in order to keep our family safe.

So for now, we will only go to stores for food and other things we absolutely need everyday (food, water, toiletries, etc.) and we will create new ways to have fun at home. Scientist and doctors are working really hard to find a cure to stop spreading the glue and to save those who become really sick.”

Elementary:

As children become older, they understand how germs are transmitted and turn into a virus. Explaining how easy it is to spread this virus from germs is key. The most crucial message to send is unlike other viruses, scientist have no cure for people who become really sick. You can use the same analogy for preschoolers and replace the word “glue” with “germs.”

Because most children want to be good citizens, providing direct tools to enact is key. Creating a reminder to “wash your hands for 20-seconds” at each sink in the home is something they can do.

Middle schoolers and up:

A different kind of message may need to be sent. They have access to varying media outlets. Having a round table discussion about myths and facts is key. While they understand COVID-19, mixed messages have been sent leading them to believe that only senior citizens can contract this virus.

Send the message that this virus does not discriminate between young and old. Even if we are without symptoms, we could be carriers of the virus and infect others.



What are some ways parents can ease their children through this Covid-19 crisis?

Think attitude and disposition! Early on, we did not want our kids to be afraid or scared which made us decide to keep the news off during the day. We wanted to be intentional about messages conveyed. In our minds, we worked to keep them informed without placing unnecessary fear on them. Providing education about the virus, how it spreads, and steps for protection was more than enough.

Parents, exercise daily measures to find the balance between knowledge and overkill. It is appropriate to discuss how the virus is impacting daily norms. It is appropriate to acknowledge the things you miss. Just be able to acknowledge things you look forward to with this temporary norm.

By nature, we are social. It is appropriate to acknowledge that 24 hours at home is not exactly natural for most. Be willing to express that; however within that, find the balance of teaching them how to respond in tough situations.

If you are not at ease, they won't be at ease. Before checking in with them, check-in with yourself.

How do you feel about COVID-19?

What are your thoughts and fears?

Do you have an adult to check-in with regularly to express yourself?

Once you get those thoughts squared away, then decide what message you want to send to your child. From there, start with the following question:

What are some things you miss outside of home?

Cultivate an atmosphere that comfortably allows them to express their feelings. In return, share the things you miss. This act is truly healthy. The more transparent you are, the more transparent they will become.



Can you share tips for parents that are new to homeschooling?

Absolutely! Please know parents that you are probably doing much better than you think.

Tip 1: *Show yourself some grace. Show your child some grace. Most children are not accustomed to mom or dad being their primary educator. Like anything new, it will take some serious adjustment.*

Tip 2: Get organized and quick! A firm foundation will help you get through the day without feeling like nothing was accomplished or where did the time go.

This simply means you should know before the week starts the things you need to accomplish. For example, there are certain things that have to happen everyday: math, ELA (reading, writing, grammar), movement (don't take this for granted), eating (please feed the kids), fun (non-academic work), chill (decompress time-you need it too).

From there, add the other things you want to happen (electives): art, science, history, geography, social studies, foreign language. You can shoot for the electives two times a week. Create a loose schedule (including meal and playtime) and see how it feels.

Tip 3: Be flexible. Make changes, as needed. By week two, you will have a great idea of what is working. You will also find that once a good schedule is developed, your child may start self-guiding their learning.

Tip 4: Outside resources are a friend. I make changes to curriculum because sometimes I flat out don't like what is offered! Or, an outside resource does the job better. You don't have to go to that extreme, but it is okay to find different tools to teach the same information. Whatever you need to promote a strong learning environment is key!

Tip 5: Teaching multiple children? No problem. Assigning independent work is a must. This is where your electives become your best friend. Don't feel like you need to be fluent in a foreign language before teaching it. Use online tools to teach the lesson. A multitude of online subject-specific programs are readily available now (many free of charge during this pandemic). Providing independent work frees you up to teach your other students (ahem, I mean kids).

Tip 6: Your class, your rules! Remember, you are the parent (now also the teacher) and what happens on your ship is what goes. Don't feel bad if you don't do things like Mr. Johnson or Mrs. Smith. You are not them. You are you. And in that, you have something important to impart on your child (even if it's learning that blasted new math).

Tip 7: Have fun! Ever had a teacher that clearly hated their job? Yeah, we all have. You don't have to love teaching, but find a positive element that makes it fun for everyone. If you don't enjoy it, they won't enjoy it. If you resist, they will resist. Try to make the best of a truly unique situation.

What keeps you motivated?

Luckily, I was a homeschooler when COVID-19 broke out in the United States. We quickly had to find ways to explore the world without parks, museums and libraries. Watching the creativity of my children planning activities for us as a family was motivating.

It also showed my children the difference between wants and needs without being preachy. No malls or movie trips is genuinely humbling them in ways unimaginable. It's making me recalibrate how we will live after COVID-19.

The inner geek in me gets elated when explaining complex topics to the kids. As the situation progresses, I take it as an opportunity to break down the science behind all that is occurring.

My final motivator during this time is encouraging parents to take this time to truly connect with their children. I love teaching parents tools how to understand their children, cultivating amazing relationships, and debunking myths and taboos in parenting. With so much time on our hands, this is a unique opportunity for parents to

take advantage of the time that is so rarely given. Although COVID-19 is absolutely devastating, we have a chance to make it a safe, magical experience.

Parent Motivators:

- 1. In the midst of COVID-19, this is a unique opportunity. Rather than solely focusing on luxuries missed outside of the home, focus on your most valued possession-each other. We can always replace “things” but we can never replace each other.*
- 2. Recalibrate your life. Bask in this chance to hone in on your life goals. Write that next great novel. Make a 5-year plan. Catch up with people you NEVER have the chance to chat with. Connecting through digital platforms is just as effective as seeing loved ones face to face (accept for the huggers of the world, sorry y’all).*
- 3. Connect with your child. Homeschooling is only one part of the day. Learn how to play their favorite video game. Go outside to play with them. Read a fun story together. Bake a cake. Build a popsicle house. Remember, the apple does not fall far from the tree. You may enjoy their activities as much as they do.*
- 4. Consider the mark you want to make on this world. Consider what you want to impart on your child. They will only be this age once. Enjoy it to the fullest. Stay safe, stay sane, keep calm, things are going to be better than okay if we work together to make it that way!*

Thanks so much to Cherina for her amazing advice be sure to keep up with her and her practice at www.iheartspeechtherapy.com // IG @CHERINAWILLIAMSSLP

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