

Coronavirus

Clear Answers for All Kids

Arlen Grad Gaines and
Meredith Englander Polsky

For our world

Preface

The Coronavirus Pandemic is a difficult topic for parents to explain to any child, perhaps even more so when the child has Autism Spectrum Disorder or other special needs. Many of these children process information in a concrete manner, prefer established routines, and need support to understand and interpret emotions. We wrote this digital version of *I Have a Question about Coronavirus* to provide a straightforward resource that takes these considerations into account and seeks to cover the wide range of questions that emerge as children (and adults) grapple with this global emergency.

We believe that special education is just *really* good education, and hope that this book, and the strategies contained within, serves as a resource for all children.

I Have a Question about Coronavirus consists of three components:

1. **The Complete Story**

Created with straightforward text and clear illustrations for children who process information best through words and pictures.

2. **Short Picture Story**

Designed for children who learn best through visual cues, and for those who may want to re-read the story and think about it independently.

3. **Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers**

Written for the adults in a child's life, helping them continue the conversation about the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Hi! I'm a kid who likes a lot of things. I like playing games, going swimming and watching my favorite show.



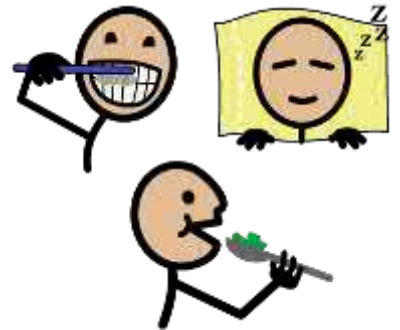
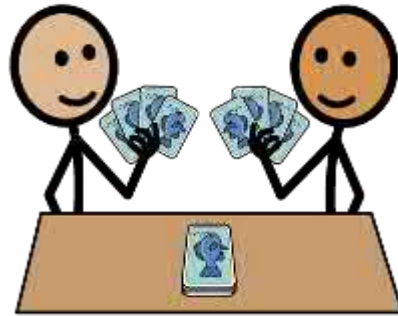
I'm also a kid who likes to know what to expect each day. Most of the time that works out fine.

Most days are regular days. They go like this:

I wake up. I have breakfast. I brush my teeth and my hair. I get dressed for school and I walk to the bus.



I see my teachers and friends and work hard. In the afternoon, I come home, do my homework, and play at my house. I eat dinner, take a shower (most nights!), and go to sleep.



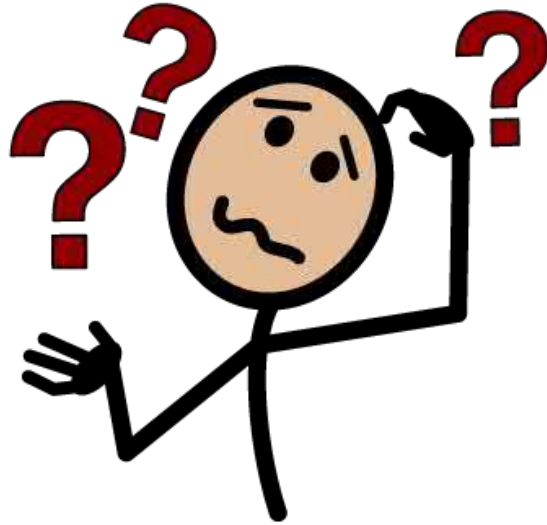
Once in a while, though, something different happens and the day doesn't go the way I expect.

Today was one of those days. I learned something new. I learned that there is a Coronavirus Pandemic.



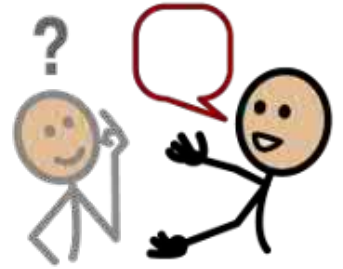
I really wasn't expecting that. I've never heard those words before!

Now I have a lot of questions. I'm a kid who likes when there are answers to my questions. Today, I'm asking my questions and some of them have answers. But some of them don't.

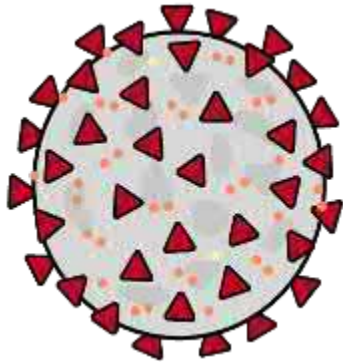


“What is Coronavirus?”

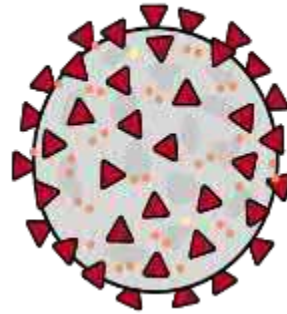
That is my first question. It has an answer.



Coronavirus is a kind of illness. It’s also called COVID-19. Some other illnesses are colds, flu and ear infections. I’ve heard of those! Coronavirus has actually been around for a long time, but the *kind* of coronavirus that people are talking about now is new.

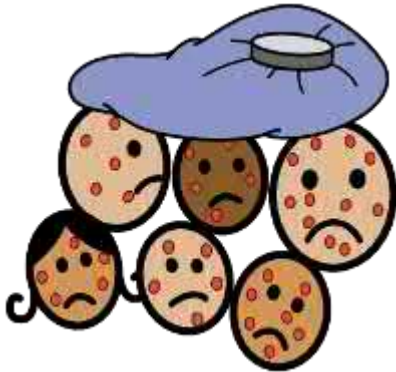
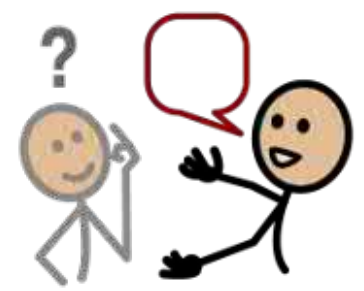


COVID-19



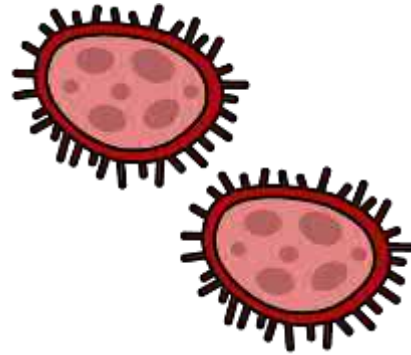
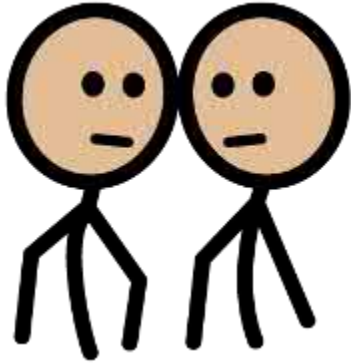
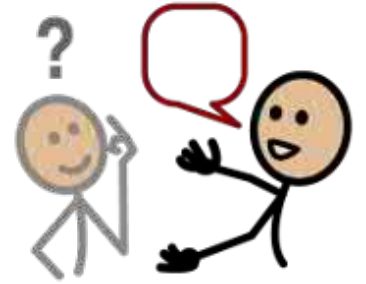
“What is a pandemic?”

I thought Coronavirus and pandemic were all one thing, but it turns out they are two different things! Pandemic means that lots of people in lots of different parts of the world are getting the same kind of illness. Right now, lots of people are getting Coronavirus, so it's called a Coronavirus Pandemic. But it's still just one kind of illness.



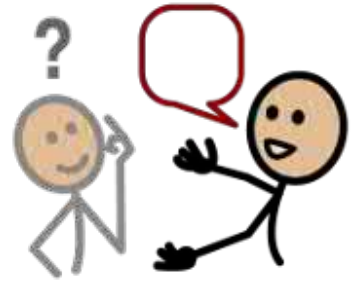
Next I want to know, **“How do people get Coronavirus?”**

Usually, people who have Coronavirus caught the germs from someone else who already had Coronavirus. They didn't do it on purpose. That's just how germs are spread.

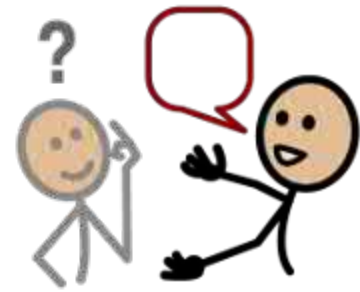


“Can I catch Coronavirus?” I ask. I am getting worried.

Yes. If someone already has Coronavirus, and I spend a lot of time with them, or if that person sneezes on me, I could catch Coronavirus.



Uh-Oh. **“What happens if I get Coronavirus?”** I wonder.



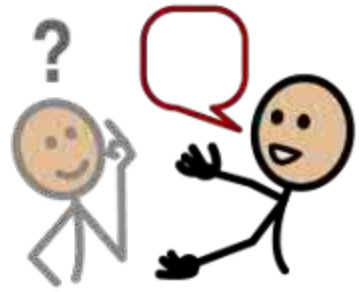
I learn that when kids my age get Coronavirus, it is a lot like getting a cold or the flu. I might not feel well for a few days - my throat and my stomach might hurt, or I might have a cough.

I don't like when I get sick, but at least I know what it feels like. And every time I've gotten sick, I've also gotten better!



It doesn't sound so bad. **Why is everyone talking about it?**

Even though Coronavirus doesn't make kids too sick, it can make adults very sick. Some adults - especially older ones - might even have to go to the hospital if they get Coronavirus. Sometimes they might even die.



Since it's easy to catch Coronavirus by getting too close to people, we need to try to make sure that we can help more people stay healthy.

But there's another reason too, and this is something I've *never* heard of before!

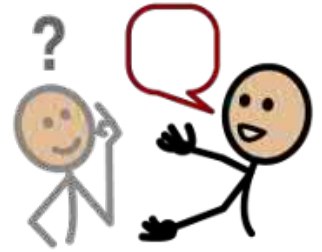
It's called "flattening the curve".

Curves are not flat! Curves are... well, curvy!



What do people mean when they say we are trying to “flatten the curve”?

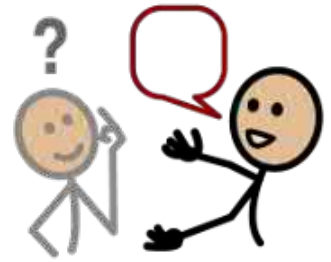
It turns out that lots of grown-ups have never heard of this either. Sounds like we're all learning new things! During a pandemic, when so many people are getting sick with the same thing, lots of people need to go to the doctor or the hospital. Even though there are *a lot* of doctors and hospitals in the world, there are not enough of them if too many people get sick at the same time.



“Flattening the curve” doesn’t mean that people won’t get Coronavirus, it just means that they won’t all get it at the same time. That will help make sure that there are enough doctors and hospitals to help the people who are sick.



How do we “flatten the curve”? I didn’t know about this before, but maybe I can help!



I learn that I am already helping! My school is closed and my activities are canceled. I am mostly staying at home and not getting too close to people who don't live in my house. It's called “social distancing” and that is exactly what everyone can do to help “flatten the curve”!

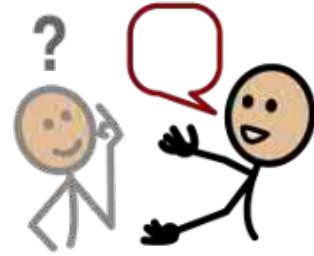


My parents might have to work from home, and the rest of my family is home, too. There are days when we are all together all day long. Sometimes that feels like too much for me. It's too noisy and I don't have enough space.

It's okay for me to take a break, or go to a quiet space and come back when I feel ready.



I liked things the way they were, when I could go to school and do all my activities. I knew what to expect every day. So I ask, **“Will my days ever go back to how they were?”**

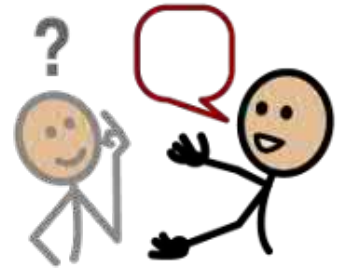


Yes! I'm so glad to hear that the answer to this question is yes!



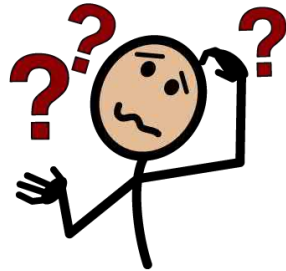
Of course, I know what to ask next!

“When will my days go back to how they were?”

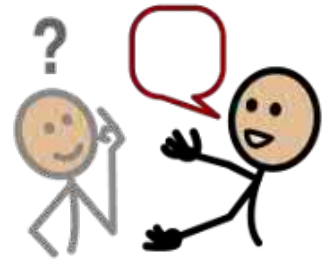


I'm ready for an easy answer! But that question is not so easy to answer. Nobody knows exactly when my days will go back to how they were before the Coronavirus Pandemic.

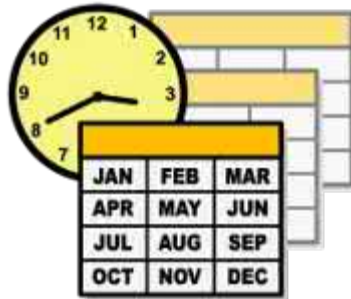
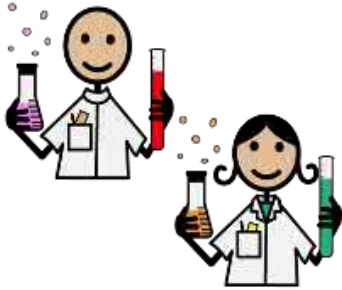
I don't like not having an answer to my question. It's hard not knowing exactly how long this is going to last. But I do feel better knowing it won't last forever.



“How will I know when it’s safe to go back to school and do all the things I usually do?” I want to know.



I learn that doctors and scientists all over the world are working together so they can tell us when it’s safe to go back to our regular days. When they tell us it is time, I know that I can listen to them and do all the things I used to do before all this began.



I find out that even though the Coronavirus Pandemic is a big deal, not *everything* has to change.

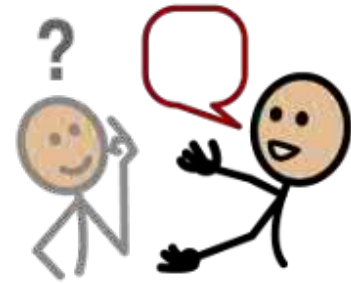
I can still play with all of my toys at home, I can go outside and I can give hugs and high-fives to the people who live in my house. I can read books and watch videos and even video chat with my friends and family.

I can't see everyone I want to see right now, like my teachers and friends. I can't go to the playground or go swimming. But I will see them again, and I will get to do my favorite things again.



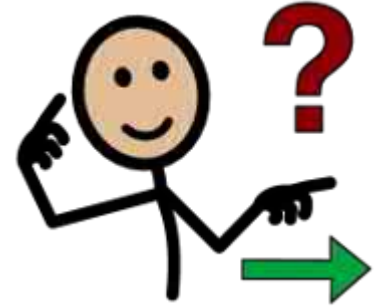
This is a lot of stuff to think about at one time. **“What does the Coronavirus Pandemic feel like to everyone else?”**

I learn it can feel scary for kids and for grown-ups. Kids might feel nervous. Grown-ups might feel nervous, too. They want to make sure everyone they love stays healthy. It can also feel really hard to grown-ups and to kids not to have a regular schedule every day.

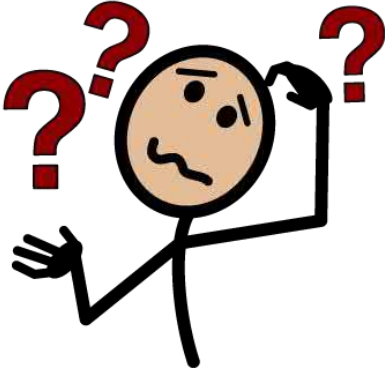
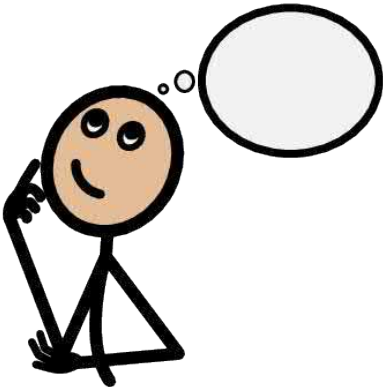


But it won't stay like this forever. The Coronavirus Pandemic will end and we will go back to school and back to our friends, teachers and activities.

Even though lots of things are different right now, lots of things are the same. I will have regular days again. I will still wake up, eat my breakfast, do school work at home and play. I will try to be flexible when things don't go exactly as planned.



I might think of more questions to ask, or I might not want to ask any more questions about the Coronavirus Pandemic.



Most days are regular days. Most days I know just what to expect. Right now my days are different, but I am learning a lot. Mostly I'm learning that asking questions really helps!



Short Picture Story: I Have a Question about Coronavirus

On the pages that follow, you will see the same pictures used in the story along with shorter, more direct text. This is a tool for children who learn best through visual cues, and for children who might want to re-read and think about the story independently.

Hi!



I like games.



I like swimming.



I like watching my favorite show.



Most days are the same.



I get dressed.



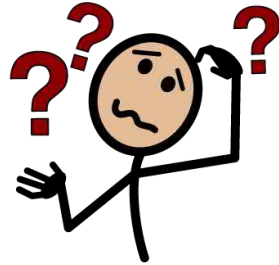
I go to school.



Today is different.
There's a
Coronavirus
Pandemic.

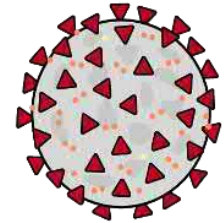
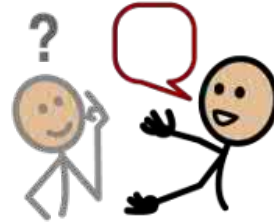


I have a lot
of questions.



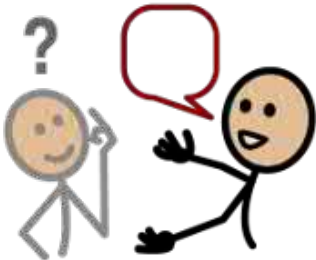
What is Coronavirus?

It's a kind of illness.

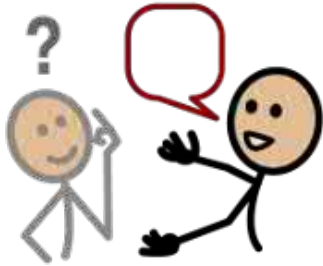


What is a pandemic?

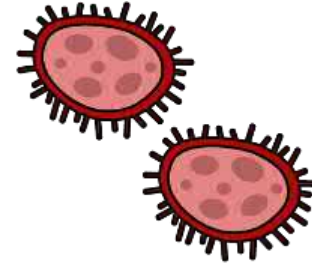
Lots of people all over the world
get the same kind of illness.



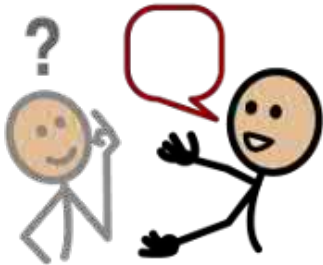
How do people get Coronavirus?



People catch germs from other people who have Coronavirus.



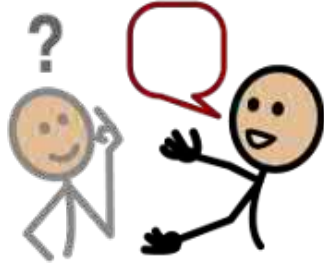
Can I catch Coronavirus?



Yes, if I catch the germs from someone who has it.



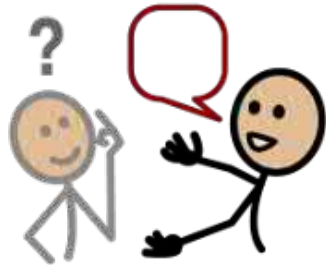
What happens if I get Coronavirus?



My throat or stomach might hurt and I might have a cough.



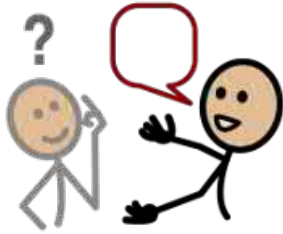
Why is everyone talking about Coronavirus?



It can make older adults very sick, so we want to help people stay healthy.



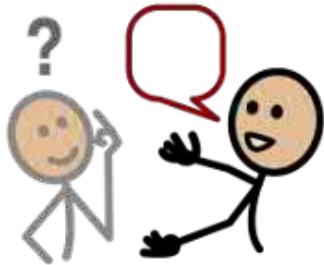
What is “flattening the curve”?



It means we are trying to make sure not everyone gets sick at the same time. Then there won't be enough doctors to help everyone.



How do we “flatten the curve”?

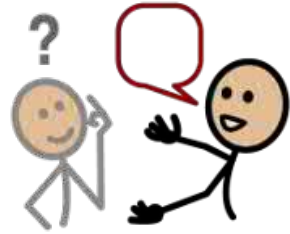


We stay home as much as we can. I can take a break or go to a quiet space if my house is too loud or crowded.



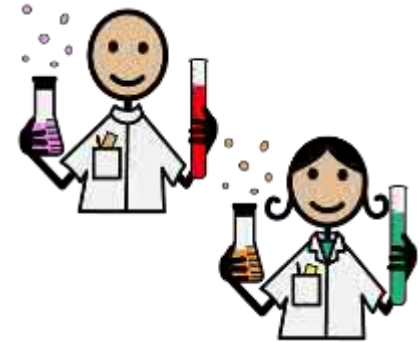
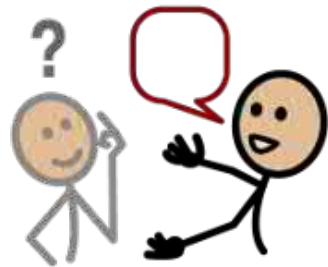
Will my days ever go back to how they were?

Yes. We just don't know when.



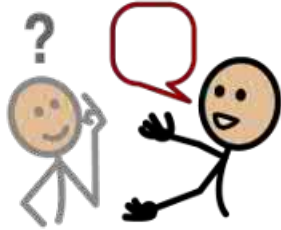
How will I know when it's safe to go back to school?

The doctors and scientists will tell us.



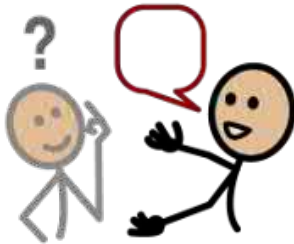
Are my days going to be different?

Yes, but I can still play with my toys at home, go outside, read books, watch videos and hug the people in my house.



What does the Coronavirus Pandemic feel like to everyone else?

Kids and grown-ups might feel nervous.



Lots of things are different, but lots of things will stay the same.



I will have regular days again.



Asking questions really helps!



Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers

Communicate with the child

Talking with children, including kids with special needs, about a pandemic may feel daunting, especially as this is uncharted territory for adults as well. However, it can often be scarier and more anxiety-provoking for a child to sense the changes, but not be told explicitly. Use honest, clear language, parceling out information as children are able to process it. Because many young children and children with special needs are concrete thinkers, the use of simple, clear phrases can be helpful.

Address concerns about Coronavirus

Even if they don't ask, children are likely to worry about getting sick themselves, or that someone they love will get sick and die. Parents and caregivers can address that fear. They can share that most people, especially children, will be able to feel better if they get sick, but it is possible for some people to die from this virus. Help address ways parents, caregivers, and children can help themselves and others stay healthy, such as by washing hands and staying home most of the time so that germs aren't shared. Be mindful of what children are seeing on the news or online, as that can contribute to increased anxiety.

Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers

Provide emotional guidance

Some children, including those with special needs, may regress or turn to self-soothing behaviors as they cope with many changes in routine and feelings of anxiety because of this pandemic. Children may become more withdrawn, irritable, anxious or aggressive. Help them recognize their feelings, provide a calming presence, and convey messages of reassurance and unconditional love. Partner with other adults in their lives, if possible, including therapists, to help support them during this time.

Pay attention to structure and routine

Many children have difficulty with changes in routine, and may struggle with the significant disruption caused by this pandemic. Many schools are closed, and activities and social activities have been suspended. Help create a sense of structure in the child's day, even if that routine greatly differs from before. A picture schedule or calendar can be a helpful tool.

Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers

Provide sensory-based supports

Utilize sensory-based supports and strategies that have been comforting in the past, and have those available to the child. Consider having a pile of pillows a child could jump into, or a box of fidget toys accessible.

Considerations for parents or caregivers

Recognize the impact and anxiety this pandemic has on parents and caregivers, and continue to try to focus on self-care in the midst of caring for others. Try to exercise, get enough sleep, and stay connected with friends and family by phone or social media to combat social isolation. Reduce exposure to the news, if feeling overwhelmed, and find ways to take breaks.

in the same series

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Arlen Grad Gaines and Meredith Englander Polsky

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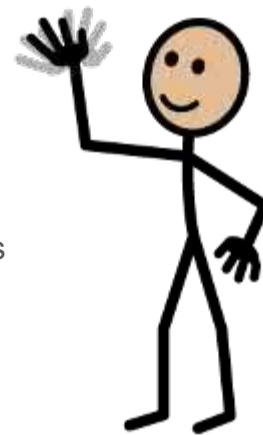
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They are the co-authors of the award-winning “I Have a Question” book series, which addresses complicated topics for all children, inclusive of kids with special needs.