

Our kids hear so much bad and frightening news, such as Avian (bird) Flu. It is important that we as parents are talking and praying with our kids about what they see and hear in the news before their fears blow out of proportion.

# Bird Flu Blues

## -helping kids cope with fear

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**M**y son Josh was scared. You could see it in his little face. Angst was written all over him. His knuckles were as white as his t-shirt. He stared down. "What's up?" I asked with a smile hoping to relieve his fears. "Daddy," he nervously replied, "I'm afraid I'll get Bird Flu!"

And this from a seven year old! At breakfast time!!

I'm not sure if Josh had heard me talking about Bird Flu or if he heard about it at school. Whatever the case, kids do hear all that is going on around us and need to be helped through their fears before they get a pandemic of the stomach. There are in fact just a few simple things we as parents can do to help our kids work through issues, regardless of the age or gender of our bundles of joy.

A lot of what kids (and especially youth) need is simply an ear. Talking with your child about the issues at hand is vitally important. When I explained to Josh that Bird Flu is very susceptible to heat and that just zapping his breakfast in the Microwave already killed all those bad guys (germs) his face light up like a Christmas tree. I also explained to him a few other facts about Bird Flu including tips on washing hands, covering the mouth when coughing and not kissing the neighbors chicken. Adding a few practical steps can help your child relate to the more complex "how's", and in this case, even have the added benefit of finally getting those hands washed before meals.

Of course my son knows I travel to Asia and in fact lived in China where **influenza** is birthed. So yes, I told him too of precautions I take, vaccines which are available against the flu virus and most importantly, that God is in control so I don't have to worry. I suggested to Josh that he too can pray for me when I travel and that he is under God's protection. I took it another step and said we can do something positive and helpful for other kids. We talked about what he could tell his friends at school should they get scared. We talked about how we could pray together for kids in China. And we talked about giving to help fund research. All these things helped Josh face the issue of Bird Flu in a different light.

I know that Josh is not completely over his fears. He hears more and more about Bird Flu and I know that when kids are sick at school Josh wonders of they "have it." That is why I keep up to date with Josh about what is going on without making Bird Flu an issue or blowing it out of proportion. I hear in his prayers that it is sometimes on his mind, other times not. So I keep a balance in how or when I approach the subject. And of course I make the point to always pray God's protection over us as a family and to keep our house safe. In this way Josh gets a perspective on life which doesn't suggest that danger is non-existent but rather that through action and prayer we don't have to live in fear.