

How to Talk to Children About Coronavirus (COVID-19)

News of the coronavirus (COVID-19) is everywhere, from the front page of all the news to the playground at school. Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it.

Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry *more*. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. Your goal is to help your children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news.

Here are some suggestions regarding talking to children about COVID-19:

Remain calm. Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions. What you say and do about COVID-19 can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety. So, stay calm and don't panic. If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine. Remind them that you and the adults at their school/childcare are there to keep them safe and healthy.

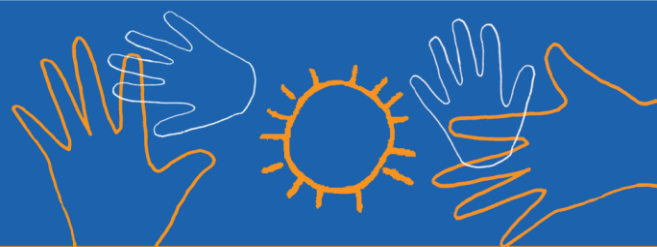
Be reassuring. Children are very egocentric, so hearing about COVID-19 on the news may be enough to make them seriously worry that they'll catch it. It's helpful to reassure your child that there aren't a lot of cases in children. If children do get the virus, it tends to be very mild (like a cold).

Take your cues from your child and make yourself available. Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions. Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about COVID-19, and let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective. It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them and make time for them. Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection

Be developmentally appropriate. Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.

Monitor television viewing and social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present. Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Make sure an adult is the one who takes on the news and will be the person who filters the news to their child. Your goal is to help your children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from TV or social media.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. An important way to reassure children is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Children will feel empowered when



they know what to do to keep themselves safe. Remind the children that they are taking care of themselves by practicing good hygiene, such as: washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two “Happy Birthday” songs) multiple times a day, and covering their mouth with their elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Stick to routine. Children don’t like uncertainty, so staying rooted in routines and predictability is going to be helpful. This is particularly important if your child’s school or childcare shuts down. Make sure you are taking care of the basics just like you would during a spring break or summer vacation. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy.

Keep talking. Tell children that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open. You can say, “Even though we don’t have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, mom or dad will let you know, too.”

For more information regarding coronavirus (COVID-19), please visit:

- CDC Information on [COVID-19 and Children](#)
- CDC Recommendations: [Steps to Prevent Illness](#)

General CDC fact sheets to help staff and children's families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves:

- [What you need to know about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stop the spread of germs – help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses like COVID-19 \(visual/poster\)](#)

Resources:

- [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)
- <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
- https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep20-01-01-006_508_0.pdf
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PYrKYfOBa4p-azI5z_46KJMbi1FSmL_Y/view
- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-talking-about-the-coronavirus>