

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

Every day brings new information about the spread of the coronavirus. It can be challenging to make sense of this information as an adult, and even more confusing as a child. Here are some tips to guide parents and caregivers in talking to your children about this health issue:

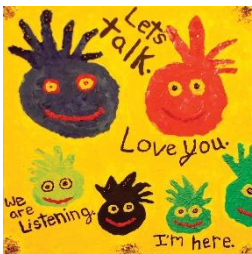
Manage your own anxiety

Before talking with your children, pay attention to your own anxiety and stress about coronavirus. You are a role model for your children, and it is important for them not to pick up on your anxiety or stress.

- ◇ Talk with other adults about your worries and concerns.
- ◇ Consider taking a break from watching or reading the news if you notice you are feeling increased stress and worry.
- ◇ It is ok to tell other people, “I don’t want to talk about the coronavirus right now”.

Encourage your children to talk with you

Before you provide information, find out what questions and concerns your child has. Let your children’s specific questions and concerns guide you in knowing what, and how much information to share. This is especially important with younger children. It is very likely that children are discussing coronavirus at school. Just because your child doesn’t talk about it, does not mean it’s not on their mind. It is important for them to talk about what they are thinking and feeling, and not to keep it in.



Listen to what your children are worried about. Do not dismiss their fears. If your child is afraid because a friend told your child that he or she might die from coronavirus, that’s a real fear. Take this fear seriously and show your child that you are listening to him/her. If you respond by saying, “You’ll be fine,” he or she might not feel heard. Instead respond by saying “that sounds pretty scary.” Talk about a time from your own childhood when you were scared, and how you handled the situation.

Talk at an age-appropriate level

- ◇ Use facts available about the coronavirus to talk to your children in an age-appropriate way. Start by asking your children what they know and encourage your children to always bring their questions to you. You can explain:

There are many kinds of viruses and coronavirus is a new kind of virus. Sometimes when you get sick your nose is stuffy, you have a fever, or your head hurts. You feel that way and have those symptoms because you have a virus.

Some people who have coronavirus might feel sick and some might feel ok. People who are sick, are being taken care of by doctors.

This disease is new. Many scientists are trying to learn about it and are working very hard to make sure that more people don’t get sick. They are trying their best to keep people safe and healthy.

Teach your children that to stay healthy they should wash their hands and avoid touching their mouth, eyes, and nose. Model this habit for them. Everyone in the family should wash their hands for 20 seconds after bathroom use, before eating, and after going to public places.

- ◇ Your child may see people wearing face masks in everyday places like the grocery store or pharmacy. Don't make a big deal out of it. If your child is curious about these face masks you can respond:

That person believes that wearing a mask will help them to stay healthy. Every family has different strategies to stay healthy. That's why we need to make sure and wash our hands. You've been doing a great job!

Stay positive

- ◇ If your children's school is closed or sporting events are cancelled, try to frame it as a positive. Focus on this as a chance to have more time at home having fun rather than something to be afraid of. You can say:

There's a lot of yucky germs around and we're going to stay at home to let people get all the germs out of your school.

It is better for us not to be around large crowds right now, but we can practice soccer on our own.

- ◇ Prepare activities to keep your child engaged in case of extra time at home.
- ◇ Try to maintain a routine as much as you possibly can.
- ◇ Talk together about other challenging times you've gotten through as a family.



You can explain:

Remember when it snowed so much we couldn't go anywhere? We were ok and made it through being snowed in at home. We've gotten through hard times together before and we can do it again now. We're a little bit worried and don't have all the answers. But we didn't have all the answers then either.

Reach out for help

If you notice changes in your child's behavior or notice that your child is more worried or anxious than usual, please talk with your pediatrician for additional guidance and support.

Resources

- ◇ NPR has published a comic entitled "Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus": <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>
- ◇ Brainpop has a helpful animated video: <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>
- ◇ New York Times has published "How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus": <https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk>
- ◇ HuffPost has published, "Coronavirus: How to Talk to Your Kids about the Disease" <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coronavirus-how-to-talk-to-kids-disease | 5e5c615ac5b601022113151>