

Tips for Talking with Children About Coronavirus



As public conversations around coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family, and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimises anxiety or fear.

General principles for talking to children:

1 Remain calm and reassuring
Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

2 Make yourself available to listen and to talk
Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.

3 Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma
Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

4 Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online
Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

5 Provide information that is honest and accurate
Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child. Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have a cold or the flu. Children pick up on it when parents worry. So when you talk about coronavirus, use a calm voice and try not to seem upset.

6 Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs

Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick. Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.

Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff. (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities). Get children into a handwashing habit:



Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.



If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in schools and childcare facilities.

7 Let your kids know that it's normal to feel worried

Everyone does. Recognising these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience.

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