

How to Talk to Kids About the Coronavirus



Ask Questions

Starting a conversation by asking questions helps you

- assess what your kids have already heard
- catch and correct misinformation
- and encourages your child to share more with you in the future

"What have you heard about the Coronavirus?"
"Do you know what it is?"
"Is there anything that you're worried about?"



Acknowledge Feelings

It's tempting to want to "fix things" or only focus on the positive so as to reduce anxiety. While those steps are important, a healthy approach begins with acknowledging feelings and making space for them before jumping into action.

Name Their Feelings

"It sounds like you feel ___ (scared, concerned, worried, confused, etc.)"

Reflect/Empathize

"I bet you feel ___ right now."
"Sometimes I feel ___ too."

Connect/Be Present

- Sometimes your child just needs you to sit with them and calmly breathe
- Hugs can help!



Provide Information

⇒ Find a balance to sharing information that seems **helpful** and **age appropriate**. You can do a mental check with these 2 guiding questions:

- **Is it helpful** for my child to know this information? (if a child already has partial or misinformation they can start to imagine far worse scenarios than what is really happening).
- **Is it age appropriate?** (try to frame information using words your child can understand)

⇒ **Look up reliable information** at the [\(CDC\) website](#)
If age appropriate, you can involve your child in the research process since the CDC presents information in a calm, straightforward manner (compared to some news outlets and online posts).

⇒ **Correct misinformation:** Remind children that there is a lot of misinformation going around. Reframe overly exaggerated information.

For Younger Kids

"Coronavirus is like getting a cough or the flu, but some people who catch it have gotten really sick and that's why people are being extra careful and schools are closing. Most people who catch the virus stay home, rest and get better."

If Kids Ask About Death, be Honest

"Most people who catch it get better, but there are some people, mostly much older, who have died from this virus."

How It Spreads

"When those who have the virus touch people, or are too close when they cough or sneeze, then they might get others sick. They can also leave their germs on objects which is why we need to be more aware of what we touch, and wash our hands really well."



Reassure: Focus on Action

Others are creating safety

Share with an optimistic tone (vs shock or disbelief) all the steps people are taking to help the community stay healthy. It's true that schools are closing, people are staying home, gatherings are being canceled all of which creates very real challenges and stress for us to process. However, with your kids, focus on how the community is coming together to take big safety steps and how that will help.

"Wow, people are really working hard to help keep people healthy by staying home /cancelling ____".

"Health workers are doing so much to help people."

We can help create safety

Focus on what your family can do by practicing healthy habits

"Washing our hands, getting sleep, eating well, and moving our bodies will help our immune systems stay strong and fight off illness."

If children are worried about friends or family they could:

- Write a letter or make cards for loved ones
- Draw a picture of loved ones
- Call loved ones
- Video chat with loved ones

Make handwashing fun

- Play a favorite song as you wash hands
- Make funny faces while you wash hands
- Sing extra slowly for dramatic emphasis
- Count in another language that you're learning
- Challenge them to list __ number of __ (colors, capitals, animals, favorite ice cream flavors, etc.)



Keep Communication Open

⇒ Kids might not share all of their concerns readily or all at once.

- Be patient and aware of when your child wants to talk again (are they hovering near you as you cook dinner or are they "acting out" more to get your attention?)
- It is common for a child to ask a question, continue playing or talk about something completely different, and then return back to the serious topic minutes to days later.

⇒ Repeat all of the above steps as the situation continues to evolve and we all become aware of new information. What's important is that your child knows that you will make time for them, listen to them, and talk to them honestly.



Your actions speak volumes

- How are you feeling about COVID-19? How is that showing up in your mood and tone of voice?
- How often are you checking the news?
- How often are you washing your hands?

Don't know what to do? Pause, and think it through

Your child might ask a question for which you don't know the answer, or you aren't sure how much information you should share.

It is better to take time to collect your thoughts or do your research than it is to lie, which could decrease the chances of them coming to you in the future for information.

Anti-discrimination

Misinformation can lead to fear and hostility, which can lead to discrimination. It's important that children understand that the virus is not caused by someone's race or ethnicity, just as it's important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.