



## Talking to Kids about COVID-19

### (Younger kids (not yet in school or just starting))

Young children naturally ask continuous questions and are increasingly curious about almost anything they hear. Unavoidably the topic of Coronavirus has had an impact in each home due to a National State of Emergency. If you find that your younger children are becoming curious about the topic and feel uneasy on how to communicate such a heavy topic, here are a few tips and strategies to begin with:

- **Offer Comfort — and Honesty**
  - Focus on helping your child feel safe but be truthful. Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in. For example, if kids ask about school closings, address their questions. But if the topic doesn't come up, there's no need to raise it unless it happens.
  - If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, say so. Use the question as a chance to find out together. Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for up-to-date, reliable information about coronavirus (COVID-19). That way, you have the facts and kids don't see headlines about deaths and other scary information.
- **Speak calmly and reassuringly**
  - Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have a cold or the flu. Kids pick up on it when parents worry. So when you talk about coronavirus and the news, use a calm voice and try not to seem upset.
  - Give kids space to share their fears. It's natural for kids to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let your child know that kids don't seem to get as sick as adults. Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them.
  - Know when they need guidance. Be aware of how your kids get news and information, especially older kids who go online. Point them to age-appropriate content so they don't end up finding news shows or outlets that scare them or have incorrect information.
- **Help Kids Feel in Control**



- Give your child specific things they can do to feel in control. Teach kids that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often can help them stay strong and well. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading to others. Be a good role model and let your kids see you washing your hands often!
  - Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy. Young kids might be reassured to know that hospitals and doctors are prepared to treat people who get sick.
  - Kids and teens often worry more about family and friends than themselves. For example, if kids hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Letting them call or Skype with older relatives can help them feel reassured about loved ones.
  - Let your kids know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times. Everyone does. Recognizing these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience.
- **Keep the Conversation Going**
    - Keep checking in with your child. Use talking about coronavirus as a way to help kids learn about their bodies, like how the immune system fights off disease.
    - Talk about current events with your kids often. It's important to help them think through stories they hear about. Ask questions: What do you think about these events? How do you think these things happen? Such questions also encourage conversation about non-news topics.

### **(Middle School aged)**

For the last couple months, all eyes have been on the developments regarding the new coronavirus, that is causing an illness called COVID-19. Many parents are understandably concerned and are sharing these concerns with family and friends. Children have also heard about this virus and can feel that there is a sense of worry from adults and some of their fellow students.

With so much information being released every day, your children might have some questions. Below are some tips on how you can respond to their questions:



- **Ask about what they know:** Keep your child's age in mind when asking questions. For children in middle school you could ask "Have you heard about the coronavirus from friends or adults?"<sup>(2)</sup>
- **Provide just enough information to answer their questions:** When answering your child's questions, it is important to keep the balance between providing information without fueling fear and anxiety. If parents talk little or not at all about the topic, it may lead children to imagine the worst possible scenario. On the other hand, if parents give too much information that their children can't understand, it may create extra alarm. Try to think about the questions your child would ask about the coronavirus, if you yourself have questions, look to reliable sources such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Questions children may ask about the coronavirus & suggested responses:**
  - **What is the Coronavirus?**<sup>(4)</sup> The coronavirus is a new kind of germ that can make people feel sick and it is a lot like the common flu. Some people might not feel too sick, other people might feel very sick and find it hard to breathe.
  - **How do you catch coronavirus?**<sup>(4)</sup> It spreads like the flu, cold or a cough. When people sneeze or cough, germs leave their bodies and can be spread that way. The germs travel a long distance to enter a healthy person's body. A healthy person would have to touch surfaces with germs on them and then touch their eyes, mouth or nose. This is why it is important to not touch these areas, wash your hands with soap and water, and cough into your elbow or a tissue (then throw it away).
  - **Why are people wearing masks?**<sup>(4)</sup> Masks are for people who are sick so that they do not share germs. They are also for people who work in hospitals, like doctors and nurses so that they can help people who have the virus. You do not need a facemask.<sup>(4)</sup>
  - **Can you die from the coronavirus?**<sup>(4)</sup> Most people who have caught the virus have not died, doctors are working very hard to treat the people who have the virus and help them feel better. It is important that you keep the things you love to do and not let the virus worry you too much, while making sure that you are practicing healthy behaviors.<sup>(4)</sup>



- **Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma<sup>(1)</sup>:** With so much misinformation being spread about the virus, people can oftentimes try to assume who has the virus, the CDC reminds us that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity<sup>(1)</sup>
- **Stay calm to keep them calm:** It is important to model calmness when talking about the virus. Children will look to you to determine how worried they should be.
- **Limit news exposure on the coronavirus:** The news can be helpful in these times by keeping everyone informed but can also use wording that may cause fear in children. Try to limit news-viewing to the hours after your children go to sleep to avoid over exposure and panic.
- **Keep talking to them <sup>(3)</sup>:** You can tell them things like, "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"<sup>(3)</sup>. This will not only reassure them but will also help keep lines of communication open.
- **Keep a steady routine:** During these uncertain times, it is important to try and keep a steady routine in the lives of your children. Dr. Domingues, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institution, suggests that "...staying rooted in routines and predictability is going to be helpful right now"<sup>(3)</sup>. At home routines are specially important if your child's school has closed.
- **Things you can do for yourself:** Remember to rely on trusted forms of trusted forms of communication such as the CDC and the World Health Organization. While you shouldn't avoid the news entirely, it is important to dial down on media exposure in order to decrease unnecessary panic.
- **Coordinate in home activities for the family:** If your child's school has closed and you can work from home, try a variety of fun in home activities to keep everyone occupied. Doing these activities together can help you and your children cope with different feelings like anxiety and fear. Try to make the children's learning fun and interactive. Scholastics has a free, open access digital hub to help students keep learning at home.

1. <https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>
3. <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>
4. <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
5. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>
6. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-teens-about-the-new-coronavirus-2020031419192>



## (Tweens and Teens)

If you have teens at home you might be wondering how you can make sure they are informed just enough without feeling overwhelmed, yet also have accurate information? Your teen already may be asking many questions. Even if not, it might be a good idea to find out what your teen has heard in case you need to clarify information and ask them if they have any worries, here are a few suggestions to navigate this:

- **Maintain Normalcy:**
  - Significant changes to daily routines or schedules are stressful for anyone and convey to the child that you are very concerned or there is a crisis. Try adhering to usual routines and schedules in the household as much as possible. Consistency is key. If your teen's school is closed, helping your teen have structure during the day, may help anxiety. Sitting around idle without a plan for the day is likely to escalate anxiety, especially for teens already suffering from anxiety.
- **Listen Actively:**
  - Listen to your teen's feelings, worries, fears and questions about coronavirus. Teens may receive their news about coronavirus from school, internet, TV, home or elsewhere. They may worry that the worst may happen to them and/or their friends and loved ones. Ask questions in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner. Show your teen that you are present and interested in hearing their thoughts and feelings. This will make it easier for your teen to approach you with their thoughts and feelings in future as well.
- **Validate:**
  - Acknowledge your teens feelings. Be careful not to dismiss, invalidate, make fun of or reject their feelings. You may also inform your teen that it is common to feel this way; many other people experience the same feelings. Validating someone's feelings does not mean you agree with the beliefs underlying those feelings, but, it means you acknowledge the presence of those feelings and that you understand that such feelings are a part of the human experience. Validating is very powerful as it helps the person feel understood.



- **Know the Facts and Direct towards Facts:**
  - Your teen is likely hearing about the novel coronavirus outside home anyway, so, do not shy away from approaching or discussing it. Be proactive in talking to your teen about facts regarding the coronavirus. For this, you will need to equip yourself with and read about the facts around coronavirus first. Ensure that you are getting your facts from reliable sources, such as the CDC:<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>.
- **Consult, Collaborate with Healthcare Professionals:**
  - If your teen is suffering from an anxiety disorder or other psychiatric condition, talk to your pediatrician and arrange for a consultation with a mental health professional, if you haven't done so already. Most treatments for anxiety in children and teens should involve psychotherapy. If your teen already is under the care of a mental health professional, work closely with that professional to help your child navigate this unusual time.

For more information on the please visit the below Websites:

1. Arizona PBS- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids>
2. Anxiety and Depression Association of America - <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-talk-your-anxious-child-or-teen-about>
3. Kids Health - <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>
4. Centers for Disease and Control –
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>
6. <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>
7. The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds - <https://www.mghclaycenter.org/hot-topics/7-ways-to-support-kids-and-teens-through-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>
8. Yoga for Classrooms -<http://www.yoga4classrooms.com/yoga-4-classrooms-blog/seven-ways-to-find-grace-and-alleviate-suffering-during-the-COVID-19-Pandemic>
9. Child Mind Institute - <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
10. Youtube video for younger children on washing hands - [https://youtu.be/unV6bsvc\\_b](https://youtu.be/unV6bsvc_b)
11. Youtube video for breathing techniques - <https://youtu.be/RHpTR2wRc8c>