

How to Talk to Your Child About the Coronavirus

It can be hard to talk to your child about something that might be worrisome, especially when you don't have all the answers yourself. Even when you are anxious and stressed yourself, you can still offer comfort by answering his or her questions. Here are some strategies and tips that will help you with this tough topic.

Top Strategies for Talking About COVID-19

- 1. Listen first.** Let your child take the lead. Take your cues by the questions he or she has, and how long he or she wants the discussion to last. Find out how much your child knows about the coronavirus and ask, *What are you most concerned about? What do you want to know more about?* Children this age are often more vocal than younger children about their fears and more direct with their questions. They may have heard misleading information from peers as well. Give accurate information, and help them identify what information sources are reliable.
- 2. Be calm.** Your child will look to you to set the tone of the conversation.
- 3. Be honest.** Be honest about what is happening. Research on helping children cope with traumatic events shows that being honest helps lower children's anxiety levels. If you don't know the answer to a question, let your child know that, and offer to find the answer for him or her. Don't hide the facts.
- 4. Reassure.** Let your child know he or she can count on the people around him or her to keep him or her safe. Your child may want to list all of the people working to protect him or her, from loved ones to friends, first responders, government officials, and essential workers.
- 5. Acknowledge.** Give your child room to express and name his or her feelings—including that this is a hard, disruptive, and worrisome time. Sometimes these discussions may pop up while doing chores or family activities together—so be alert for the unprompted moments when concerns emerge. Let your child know you're listening.
- 6. Empathize.** People of all ages need empathy. Talk together about how friends and family members are feeling. You might say, *I know how hard it is for you not to see your classmates! When I'm on so many work calls, you must be annoyed!* Encourage your child to share his or her concerns with schoolwork, friendships, and family life in addition to health.
- 7. Let them help.** Helping other people gives children, and adults, a sense of control and purpose. Come up with other ideas together. Your child can help with tasks around the house, such as helping make dinner. He or she can also help with tasks that help keep everyone safe, such as washing hands and not touching faces. He or she can also connect with others, for example, by video chatting with someone who is alone, posting signs in the window, or writing cards to nurses.
- 8. Look forward.** Make plans for activities you can look forward to in the future. Planning for the future can help your child think beyond the current crisis. Even plans for small activities you and your child can do together are helpful. Children this age may also be anxious to make future plans with their peers.
- 9. Thank them.** Everyone likes to be appreciated. Children are making big sacrifices and coping with so much change and uncertainty. Let your child know that he or she is doing important work just by staying home. Thank your child for specific actions, like helping you in the kitchen or helping with a younger sibling.
- 10. Listen again.** This crisis is ever-changing, and so is our information. Likewise, their questions will keep coming. Sometimes they'll be repetitive, and other times new questions will crop up. Be attuned to clues in your child's drawings and behavior. Continue listening and talking; it's the best protection you can give your child.



What is the virus?

The coronavirus is a virus that makes people sick. Viruses can spread from one person to another. The illness is called COVID-19.

How do you get the coronavirus?

When someone who has the virus coughs or sneezes, droplets carry the virus to other people. It can also get onto objects like door handles and tables when someone who has the virus touches his or her nose or mouth and then touches the object. Someone else who touches the same object and then touches his or her face can catch the virus. Wearing a mask makes it less likely for the virus to spread. If you wash your hands and don't touch your face, you are less likely to catch the virus.

How does it feel if you get sick with COVID-19?

That is different for different people. Usually, people get a fever and a cough. Some people get a very mild case and hardly feel sick. Others get very sick for a long time. Some people need help in the hospital, and some die. Fortunately, kids who get it usually have a very mild case.

Why do we need to stay home? Why are places closed?

Experts figured out that the best way to stop this virus from spreading is to have people stay away from one another, which is called "social distancing." We hope this will cause the virus to die out when it cannot spread. It will also give scientists time to find a cure. This is also why schools and some businesses are closed and why many activities are canceled. This helps keep us safe and helps keep other people safe, especially those who are more likely to get really sick if they get the virus. Everyone has to work together to keep the community safe and healthy.

When can I see Grandma (or my friends)?

I don't know when, but I hope it will be soon! I know you really miss one another. But the less physical contact we have with other people, the less likely it is for the virus to spread, and the safer everyone will be. How do you think we can best keep in touch with them? Could we talk over video chat or send a message?

But if we're healthy, why can't we go out?

We have to avoid close contact with other people, even family and friends, to stop the virus from spreading. We might have the virus even if we feel totally fine, and that means we could spread it to someone else without even knowing it. We can go outside, but we need to do so safely. We also need to wash our hands before and after touching things that other people touch too, like door handles and elevator buttons. Everyone is being extra careful so we don't get sick and so we don't get other people sick.

What if I get sick? What if you get sick?

So far, this virus doesn't seem to make most children very sick. On top of that, we are doing everything we can to keep you safe. You can do a lot to help keep everyone safe, too. I'm doing everything I can to stay healthy, too. That's why I wear a mask when I go out, and why we wash our hands so often. Even so, it is possible I'll get sick. If I start to feel sick, I'll talk to my doctor right away. And if I ever did get sick enough to need extra help, I would make sure you were well taken care of, too. (If you have specific plans for care of your child, this can be reassuring information for them to know.)

Resources to Share With Children

First Aid for Feelings <http://teacher.scholastic.com/education/coronavirusworkbook>

Brains On www.brainson.org/shows/2020/03/10/understanding-coronavirus-and-how-germs-spread-for-kids

NPR www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus

Brainpop www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus

Kids Health <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/coronavirus-kids.html>

A note from the Collaborative:

This pandemic keeps taking us all by surprise. We really do not have a way to predict what will happen next, even though scientists are working heroically on understanding what is happening. There is ongoing tragedy, and hope can be in scarce supply. Taking care of ourselves as well as our children, trying to notice and find joy in small things, like the sounds of the birds or the blossoms blooming, and reminding children that life still goes on, can help. Children can experience wonder even in the midst of tragedy. And they can help us by sharing it with us. We just need to be careful not to make promises we may not be able to keep about if, or when, things will be different.