

How to Talk to Your Child About the Coronavirus

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

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 wondering about?* Give accurate information, but keep answers short.
- 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. Don't hide the facts.
- 4. Reassure.** Let your child know he or she can count on the people around to keep him or her safe. Together, list all of the helpers working to protect your child, from loved ones to 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 playing or cooking together, so be alert for the unprompted moments when he or she expresses concerns. Let your child know you're listening.
- 6. Empathize.** Children this age are learning all about empathy. Model by showing your empathy toward your child and others. Talk together about how friends and families are feeling. You might say, *I know how hard it is for you not to see your cousin! When I'm on so many work calls, you must be annoyed!*
- 7. Let them help.** Helping children find ways to help gives them a sense of control and purpose. Suggestions include: Wash your hands. Don't touch your face. Video chat with someone who is alone. Post signs in your window. Write cards to nurses.
- 8. Look forward.** Make plans your child can look forward to in the future. Make IOUs for future activities you'll do together. Planning for the future can help children think beyond the current crisis.
- 9. Thank them.** Everyone likes to be appreciated, especially your young child. He or she is making big sacrifices and coping with so much change and uncertainty. Let your child know he or she is doing important work just by staying home, and that you appreciate it! Thank your child for specific actions, like washing his or her hands or helping you in the kitchen.
- 10. Listen again.** This crisis is ever-changing, and so is our information. Likewise, your child's 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 behaviors. 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.

How do you get it?

If someone who has the virus coughs or sneezes, then it can spread. If that person is wearing a mask, it's less likely to spread. And if you wash your hands and don't touch your face, you'll be less likely to get it.

What does it feel like if you have it?

That's different for different people. Usually, people get a fever and a cough. Some people get a very mild case and hardly feel anything. For others, they get really sick! Kids who get it usually get a very mild case.

Why are we stuck inside?

Experts figured out that the best way to stop this virus from spreading is to take a break from having people close to each other, which is called "social distancing." We hope this will give the virus time to die out. It will also give scientists time to find a cure.

This helps us and helps other people as well, including people who are more likely to get really sick if they get the virus.

When can I see Grandma (or my friend)?

I don't know when—I sure hope it's soon! She really misses you, too. Let's keep in close touch with her. Would you like to see her on video chat? Send a message? Make a card and mail it? I know she would love that.

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

We might have the virus even if we feel totally fine. And that means we could spread it to someone else without knowing it. So everyone is being extra careful. We can still go outside, but we need to do so safely, so we don't get other people sick.

Will I get sick?

So far, this virus doesn't seem to make most children sick. I'm so glad about that! On top of that, we're doing everything we can to keep you safe!

What if you get sick?

I'm doing everything I can to stay healthy, just like you! That's why I wear a mask when I go out, and wash my hands so often! Even so, it is possible I'll get sick. Most cases are mild. 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'd make sure you were being taken care of, too.

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

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 sound 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.