

Coronavirus (COVID-19): How to Talk to Your Child

Your kids are hearing about coronavirus (COVID-19). You want to make sure they get reliable information — and you want them to hear it from you. Here's how to talk about it.

Find Out What Your Child Already Knows

Ask questions geared to your child's age level. For older kids, you might ask, "Are people in school talking about coronavirus? What are they saying?" For younger children, you could say, "Have you heard grownups talking about a new sickness that's going around?" This gives you a chance to learn how much kids know — and to find out if they're hearing the wrong information.

Follow your child's lead. Some kids may want to spend time talking. But if your kids don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's OK.

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. Older kids might be comforted to know that scientists are working to develop a vaccine. These talks also prepare kids for changes in their normal routine if schools or childcare centers close in the future.

Put news stories in context. If they ask, explain that death from the virus is still rare, despite what they might hear. Watch the news with your kids so you can filter what they hear.

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.

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