

Tips for Parents on How to Talk with your Children about COVID-19

1. Children take their emotional cues from adults. One's nonverbal messages are just as important than one's verbal messages. If your child sees you in a panic, s/he will likely experience a lot more fear and anxiety than if s/he observes you being careful, cautious, and thoughtful, but calm. To help maintain a calm atmosphere at home, practice deep breathing exercises for a few minutes each day.

2. Maintain as much of a normal routine as possible. Even though your child won't be going to school, try to maintain the same scheduled wake-up time and mealtimes. Suggest that your child to work on schoolwork in the order of his/her regular school day schedule. Make sure mealtimes and bedtimes are consistent and that you and your child are getting enough sleep. These efforts can go a long way in helping everyone cope with the stress that comes with a change of this magnitude.

3. Limit your child's exposure to various news media, whether by TV, internet, or social media. Constantly watching for status updates about COVID-19 or other closures can increase anxiety. Furthermore, some information can be inappropriate for young ears and/or difficult for them to understand, which also increases confusion and anxiety. Make time to "unplug" with your child and play a game, read a book, or watch a movie instead.

4. Don't be afraid to discuss COVID-19. Most children have already heard about it, so it's best to make sure they have the [facts](#). Focus on [what we can do](#) to remain well, like washing your hands frequently, avoiding touching your face, keeping distance between yourself and others, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces daily. While it may be tempting to avoid talking about COVID-19, remember that for some children, *not* talking about it can actually make them worry *more*.

5. Be developmentally appropriate. A conversation about COVID-19 with a sixth grader is likely to sound different than a conversation with a second grader. If you find it hard to know how much to say, take your cues from your child. Ask him/her to tell you what s/he already knows. This will give you an idea of the level of detail s/he is interested in, as well as the language s/he is already using about the topic. Answer questions slowly and thoughtfully, taking care not to offer more information than was requested. If you receive confused or inquisitive looks in return, invite another question. And remember, it's ok to say you don't know.

6. Avoid the blame game. Fear has a tendency to leave people feeling out of control. One way we feign control over the unknown is to fabricate stories about who or what is to blame. Unfortunately in these situations, innocent groups are made to suffer the consequences. Be mindful of your and your child's language. Address any instances of blame immediately by recognizing them as an unfounded attempt to assuage fear.

7. Encourage your child to keep talking. Even after having the conversation once, children can be reluctant to broach a difficult topic a second or third time. Remember to check in with your child every day or two to see if they've thought of any new questions or developed any new concerns. This can go a long way to helping your child feel safe talking with you about *anything*.

I hope the above information helps ease the fear and anxiety some of you and/or your children may be feeling. For more detailed information on the above, please visit:

1. [Child Mind Institute: Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)
2. [National Association of School Psychologists: Talking to Children About COVID-19](#)
3. [CDC: Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)

4. [Parenting During Coronavirus: What to Know about Play Dates, Education and More](#)
