

Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

A Parent/Guardian Resource

Children naturally look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events and concern over the coronavirus may be causing your children to feel anxious. If you as a parent seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents and guardians should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

General principles for talking to children

Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.

- Encourage your children to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a strong immune system to fight off illness.
- Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene – simple steps to prevent the spread of illness.
 - Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds. Take the opportunity to teach your kids proper hand washing highlighting commonly missed areas such as in between fingers and under fingernails.
 - Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
 - Encourage your children to be mindful of touching surfaces and then touching their faces, noses or mouths.
 - Don't share food or drinks.
 - Fresh air and sunlight are also beneficial to fighting viruses.
- Empowering your children to do what they can to prevent infection can also reduce anxiety.

Remain calm and reassuring.

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- Remind them that you and the adults around them are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available to listen and to talk.

- Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions and be a good listener.
- Tell them that you love them and give them plenty of affection.

Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.

- When tensions are high, sometimes people tend to blame someone out of fear or lack of knowledge.
- It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.
- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.

- Consider limiting television viewing and reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19, especially when your children are present. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- Only give as much factual information as your child asks for and make sure it is developmentally appropriate. Be aware that even developmentally appropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Upper middle school and high school youth are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19. Having this kind of knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

- Given the closures that Milwaukee is encountering, a normal routine becomes difficult but keep to a regular home schedule as much as possible.
- Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and provide them with engaging activities at home as much as possible. This is a great time to begin new traditions such as family game night or family activities that can encourage nurturing and opportunities to strengthen your family ties.
- Read with your child everyday and check out the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee website for engaging activities that can help keep your children engaged in learning.

Provide information that is honest and accurate.

- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Resources for responding to coronavirus :

What kids are hearing about coronavirus on social media: <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/family/story/talk-kids-viral-tiktok-coronavirus-videos-69431277>

Hand washing and Hand Sanitizer Use at Home: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf>
<https://youtu.be/T98ggC-yanU>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Hand-Washing-A-Powerful-Antidote-to-Illness.aspx>

How to talk to your children: <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Stay informed to changing information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-mcov/index.html>

Videos to watch with your child (for the younger kids):

- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>
- <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR1uqTdZvpvRuZ-vxOYPh2bKWKz86JdmvtGFS50YwyI2TchNRNowBeG6Llk>

For additional information check the following CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
website

Sources: The Center for Disease Control; The National Association of School Psychologists; The National Association of School Nurses; Child Mind Institute; American Academy of Pediatrics.