



How to Talk to Your Kids about the Coronavirus

- With extensive news coverage about the potentially contagious nature of the coronavirus, children may develop fears about the risk to their own health and safety, particularly with changes in routine like schools being closed and parent schedules adjusted.
- If kids raise a concern or have questions, talk to them in age and age appropriate way. Before talking to kids about what they may be seeing on the news or hearing from their peers, parents should make sure they have an understanding of the virus first.
- Experts say parents should listen to their children’s fears and not dismiss them.
- Children may have concerns, even if they aren’t talking about them.
- The best approach is to ask kids what they know first to get them talking and to assess the information they have and then to correct misinformation, provide reassurance, and acknowledge a plan of action as a family. How will it impact our day-to-day life? Are there cases nearby? The calculation for how to respond is different depending on your locale.
- While it’s known that this coronavirus transmits between people and the impact can be anything from mild to deadly, similar to influenza.
- Individuals who struggle to manage anxiety may be more stressed by news reports, taking precautions, making thoughtful decisions and not allowing oneself to be stuck is a helpful approach that applies to more in life than an emerging health threat.
- If a child expresses concern, parents offer reassurance they’re doing everything possible to keep the family healthy, “My job as a caregiver is to make sure we do everything we can to protect you from getting sick, no matter what. That’s why we wash our hands and if they’re not clean, we keep them away from your eyes and nose and mouth. We sneeze into our (elbows).”

Elementary School

Encourage your child to ask any questions they may have. It is important for children to understand school is closed just as a precaution and nothing unsafe has happened at school. Children need to understand that if they are sick they need to stay home. Reinforce, especially to young children, the importance of keeping their hands and fingers out of their nose, mouth, and eyes and practice “sneezing like a vampire.” It is important to practice good hand washing, they can sing “Happy Birthday” while washing their hands and encourage them to rub the entire time including in between their fingers.

Toothbrushes may need to be changed and let children pick out a new one to have ready when it comes time for a new one.

Middle/High School

Middle to high schools students have a lot more questions and may be privy to more information with access to the web and chats with friends. Keeping students active and solution focused is helpful. Let them help with some planning like grocery shopping to be at least three days prepared. Keeping healthy and immune systems strong are the best prevention so healthy eating, exercise, sleep, and stress reduction can help avoid becoming sick in the first place. Keep in mind that stocking up on medications or boosting immunity with medication should be a conversation held with medical practitioners. Allow teens conversations with friends to feel they have a social outlet but also keep conversations open about what is being discussed. One idea for kids of all ages is to allow each child to pick one activity they want to do that day as a family, like a board game, art activity, and movie night, something that is of their choice. It helps distract them from thinking too much about changes and generates a close family connection.

References:

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[Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social)

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What can I do as a parent to help my child?

*Educate yourself about the coronavirus and how to protect yourself. Go to reputable medical sites like the Center for Disease and Control (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/> and the World Health Organization (WHO) at <https://www.who.int/>.

- *Explain to your child that there is a new virus or illness that doctors are working very hard to understand and learn how best to treat us if we are sick with that new virus.
- While the doctors work on that, everyone in our community is working together to keep each other healthy by
 - not getting together in large groups for a short while (ie. school)
 - washing our hands regularly with soap for 20 seconds at a time (long enough to sing the alphabet song)
 - by covering our mouths with our inner elbows when we cough or sneeze
 - and by staying home when we are sick.
- When they ask you questions, be honest but appropriate.
 - For example, if you five year old asks you if he's going to get the coronavirus, you can say "I don't know, but most likely you won't because we are doing....."
- Emphasize that they are safe.
- If you as a parent are anxious, your child is going to feel that anxiety, too. If you are confident, then they will more likely feel confident as well.
- If you need to, minimize your exposure to the news on line and on the television.
- Maintain open communication with your child.
- Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings and concerns.
 - Allow for non-verbal ways to communicate as well, such as through role playing activities (ie. dolls, cars, power rangers, house, school, barbies, etc.) and art (playdough, drawing, music, dancing etc.).
- Watch for signs that your child may want to talk, such as hovering around you while you are doing chores around the house.