

Tips for discussing coronavirus with your kids

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The situation we are all currently living through with coronavirus brings with it a lot of uncertainty and a fair amount of fear. It's a rapidly-developing health crisis that is unprecedented for most of us in terms of

the way it has already and may continue to change our daily lives.

But if we struggle as adults to understand the impact and react to the constant developments, how do our children begin to comprehend coronavirus and what it means for them? If questions are being asked in your family, here's a guide to help navigate coronavirus and explain the changes it's bringing to your kids.

1. Be honest, but age-appropriate

Don't pretend it's not happening—children need to change their behavior (e.g. hand washing) so it's important they know what is going on, but always in an age-appropriate manner.

Teach kids how germs spread and how we can stop them spreading, as this is useful information for other [health concerns](#) such as colds and flu as well.

Keep it simple for [young kids](#) and provide more detailed information for older kids, but always keep the message as positive as possible in terms of what the world is doing to try and stop the virus spreading.

2. Keep them calm

Find out what they know, ask open-ended questions and address any excessive fear or misinformation that may be circulating around the playground.

Remind them that although they might catch it, it is unlikely to make them feel very sick, and most people will recover fully. Our concern is for those who may not be healthy and our older community members, and this is a great time to focus on how as a society we look after each

other.

Tell kids that the world's best scientists are working hard to understand the virus and develop a vaccine. This encourages confidence and a sense of control in a situation that may feel out of control.

Maintain as much normality in the house and daily life as you can—things have already changed in daily life and [school closures](#) may be coming but where routines can continue, stick to them as our daily structures and routines promote a feeling of certainty.

3. Remain calm yourself

Get your information from trusted sources, and as always treat [social media](#) with caution. Social media might create a feeling of community and provide useful information, but it can also promote panic and misinformation. Be aware of your own social media consumption and seek reputable sources.

Trust in the structures of our society—our government and health care system. It is important with a threat such as that we band together as a community and play our role in helping contain the virus. So follow the advice coming from our government agencies and play your role in helping the community fight this in a unified manner.

This virus is affecting our daily routine and threatening our health and financial security—they're BIG issues. So don't brush your own concerns or those of friends and family aside. But try to keep calm, seek advice and keep problems that your kids can't solve (like income changes) away from them.

Keep adult conversations amongst adults, and choose when you talk about your fears over coronavirus. Try and make sure the kids are not

around and as much as possible keep the vibe positive when they are.

4. Encourage positive action

Empower your kids to help stop the spread!

Teach handwashing, use the 20 second rule and get them to sing Happy Birthday or another favorite tune to make it fun.

Teach them to cough/sneeze into their elbow and away from other people and always wash their hands afterwards.

Remind them to eat healthy foods and get plenty of sleep to boost immunity—this might mean stricter bedtimes but encourage that as much as possible as overtiredness could impact their immunity.

For older kids, teach them about media literacy, how to find reputable sources of information, which sources to trust and how to identify non-evidence-based information. It's useful for many purposes, not just coronavirus.

5. Scaffold their disappointment

Many school events kids were looking forward to (concerts, carnivals) might be canceled, in addition to holidays they may have been very excited for. Try and talk openly with them about their disappointment. Look at it as an opportunity to build resilience, teach them life can be disappointing sometimes, but we'll support each other through bad news and good things will come again when the virus passes.

Kids may not be able to spend time with older relatives to prevent spreading coronavirus—encourage video calling and make that fun, and

help them understand they are keeping their loved ones safe by staying away temporarily.

Promote the silver lining—people are working together, we are all looking out for each other, we are taking care of the most vulnerable in our society, we are keeping the germs away as best we can!

Help them understand school closures and encourage a positive mindset about home-schooling.

6. Relax the rules

If kids are home from school you may want to relax some rules to help everyone through and create a distraction from the disappointment and possible boredom. You could relax screen time rules temporarily, allow them to stay in their pajamas for a day—whatever you can see in your household that might lend itself to surviving self-isolation and increasing the happiness vibe while things are so very different in the outside world.

7. Be on alert for highly anxious or unusual behavior

Some children are naturally anxious and the coronavirus news may push them further along towards panic. This might involve:

- Trouble sleeping or excessive fatigue
- Loss of appetite or sudden over-eating
- Excessive worry, teariness, clingy behavior
- Sore tummy or other physical symptoms
- Difficulty concentrating, irritability
- Social withdrawal

Talk to your child about their fears and try to calm them as much as possible by addressing their concerns openly and age-appropriately. Treat their fear as real, but when the source of their concern is NOT real make sure you demonstrate this and provide them with an alternative view.

Observe any unusual behavior or obsessive/repetitive behavior and ask your child about it. Examples may be excessive fear of germs or contamination, avoidance of peers, refusal to eat—anything that strikes you as unusual and of potential concern.

If you believe your child (or yourself) to be overwhelmed by the [coronavirus](#) situation, seek help from your GP as a first step.

Provided by Telethon Kids Institute

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