

# 10 TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT COVID-19 WITH YOUR KIDS:

## 1. Ensure co-parents are on the same page

It is important, if you are co-parenting, that both parents are on the same page when it comes to what you are doing and saying to your child, as different messages will confuse and possibly make your child more worried.

## 2. Don't be afraid to discuss it

Start by inviting your child to talk about the issue. Find out how much they already know and follow their lead. Make sure you are in a safe environment and allow your child to talk freely. Most importantly, don't minimize or avoid their concerns. Be sure to acknowledge their feelings and assure them that it's natural to feel scared or concerned about their loved ones.

## 3. Manage your own anxiety

It will be challenging to address your child's anxiety if your own fears feel out of control. It's easy for kids to forget that you may have fears about your own parents, your finances, your work, or just the stress of parenting 24/7 as kids are asked to stay home. Check in with friends, family, and/or a mental health professional during this time to ensure you're coping well. Your health matters too!

## 4. Model calmness

Even though you may be concerned yourself, it is important to model calmness, especially when talking about the virus. Children rely on their parents to provide a sense of safety and security and will look to you to see how afraid they should be. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to decompress before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions.

## 5. Be age appropriate

Try to answer their questions and reassure them in a way that will suit their understanding. Use developmentally-appropriate language, watch their reactions, and be sensitive to their level of anxiety. For example, you might tell a young child, "Coronavirus is a new type of cold/flu, and so it is important for us to wash our hands more and sneeze in our elbows to keep healthy." Try to avoid volunteering too much information as this may be overwhelming but instead, try your best to answer your child's questions with honesty. Remember that it is okay if you do not know all of the answers but being available to talk can help them feel calm.

## 6. Inform them on the virus and what will happen if they do get sick

Reassure your child that it is unlikely they will get seriously ill, and if they do feel ill you will look after them. Explain the most common symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, dry cough, fatigue and shortness of breath) and ask them to tell you when they feel any of these symptoms coming on. Your child might be concerned about who will look after you if you catch the virus. Let them know the kind of support you have as an adult so that they don't feel they need to worry about you.

## 7. Encourage healthy distractions

Finding different ways to stay active and connected can help you and your family find relief from feeling and thinking about stressful situations. When it comes to processing difficult

emotions, it is key to find a balance between talking about feelings and engaging in healthy activities.

## 8. Reassure and empower

Children tend to feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves and others safe. In the case of COVID-19, it is important to reassure children that there are steps they can take to help protect themselves and their families. These include:

- Appropriate, frequent handwashing (show them how and when);
- Sneezing into their elbow, then washing their hands afterward;
- Social distancing (explain what that is, but assure that it is not the same as “emotional distancing”);
- Helping to wipe down and disinfect surfaces. This reinforces their understanding of how this germ is spread through droplets.

## 9. Limit news exposure and correct misinformation

There will likely be an increase in screen time during social distancing. Be mindful of your child’s exposure to the news and model good media habits. Work with your child to clarify any misinformation or misunderstandings they have picked up about the virus through social media, the news or their peers. For example, if they ask you a question, help them to identify credible online sources of information and help them understand the information provided.

## 10. Focus on what people are doing to keep them safe

It’s important for children to know that people are helping each other with acts of kindness and generosity. Share stories of health workers, scientists and others, who are working to stop the outbreak and keep the community safe. It can be a big comfort to know that compassionate people are taking action.

## SOURCES:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/talking-to-kids-about-covid-19/>

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>

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

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[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

<https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/the-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://blog.chocchildrens.org/7-ways-to-help-kids-cope-with-coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety/>

[https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh\\_covid19\\_infosheet\\_talking\\_to\\_kids-pdf.pdf](https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh_covid19_infosheet_talking_to_kids-pdf.pdf)

<https://www.cps.ca/en/blog-blogue/how-can-we-talk-to-kids-about-covid-19>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>

## 4 QUESTIONS YOUR CHILD MAY HAVE AND HOW TO ANSWER THEM:

1. **What is the new corona virus?** The new coronavirus is a kind of germ that can make people feel sick. Remember how the flu made you feel? It can be a lot like getting the flu. Some people feel just a little bit sick and some people feel very sick. Some people get a fever and a cough and sometimes the cough can make it hard to breathe easily.
2. **How do you catch corona virus?** The virus spreads like the flu, or a cold or cough. If a person who has the coronavirus sneezes or coughs, germs that are inside the body come outside of the body. That's why it's important to stand six feet apart from people other than your family. You don't want to breathe in air with germs. This is also why we wash our hands because you may touch something where the germs have landed because someone who is sick sneezed or coughed or touched those surfaces. We should wash our hands for at least 20 seconds to stop the germs from getting inside our bodies!
3. **Why can't we leave the house?** Why can't my friends come over to play? Right now, there is a rule that families need to stay home for a little while and be together. That helps us and our friends stay healthy. I know it can be sad when we can't see and play with friends. But there are lots of fun things we can do together at home! Would you like to play a game or do a puzzle?
4. **Can you die from corona virus?** Most people who have caught the virus have not died, just like with the flu. Doctors are working really hard to keep an eye on anyone who is feeling sick. They want to make sure everyone gets the help they need and to keep the virus from spreading. What is important is that you keep practicing healthy behaviors like sneezing into your elbow and washing your hands before you eat!

### SOURCES:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3265-answering-your-young-child-s-questions-about-coronavirus>

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS:

#### CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

#### UNICEF:

<https://www.unicef.org/stories/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-what-parents-should-know>

#### CAMH:

[https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh\\_covid19\\_infosheet-talking\\_to\\_kids-pdf.pdf](https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh_covid19_infosheet-talking_to_kids-pdf.pdf)

#### Child Mind Institute:

<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

#### National Public Radio: Just For Kids:

A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus

#### Caring for Kids:

<https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/the-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid>

#### Anxiety and Depression Association of America:

<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-talk-your-anxious-child-or-teen-about>