

How to talk with children and young people about the Coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) Pandemic

How much information you share with children depends on their developmental age and maturity. The most important thing to do is proactively talk with them and address their questions and concerns.

For children under 5, keep it short and simple.

0-5

- Remind them that it is extra important to cough in their elbows and help them wash their hands for a full 20 seconds while singing the Happy Birthday song.
- You can let them know that many people are getting sick right now so it's important that everyone wash their hands.
- Answer any questions they have simply and directly. Children this age can be easily confused by metaphors or expressions so keep it direct.
- Remind them that you will keep them safe and that there are doctors and nurses to help if they get sick. If you are their parent or caregiver, give them extra snuggles and comfort if they seem stressed.

6-10

Children in this age group will be more aware of the news and have likely heard things from their friends or teachers.

- Ask them directly what they know and if they have any questions.
- They may be hearing exaggerated rumors or have exaggerated fears.
- Explain that if many people get sick all at once that it can be stressful for hospitals and doctors so we need to be extra careful to cough in our elbows, not share personal care products, and wash hands for 20 seconds.
- You should have this conversation more than once as events develop and they have more questions. Explain to them any plans you have to limit your exposure to germs, such as, "we won't be traveling because doctors are recommending that we stay closer to home".
- If you, your child, or someone you know gets sick, explain that most people will recover from the illness. They will be uncomfortable and need to rest but most people will get well. Remind them that it is no one's fault if they get sick and not to judge other children or people who are sick.
- You can explain the word quarantine, for example, quarantine is period of time after someone has been ill, when they can't go out in order to avoid giving the illness to other people. After the period of quarantine, they can go back to their normal routines.

11-14

Young people in this age group will definitely be aware of the situation and likely have questions about what is happening in their community and in the world.

- Explain to them what pandemic means. For instance, "a pandemic means that an illness has spread to all parts of the world. Even when the vast majority of people will recover from the illness, it is very hard when everyone gets sick at once." For example, "when many people visit the same website or try to download a video at the same time, it loads very slowly."
- Share any plans your family or workplace has to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- Discuss your family's plan if anyone in the family does get sick. Answer any questions they might have.
- Explain why communities are cancelling public events. For example, "Doctors, scientists, and community leaders are recommending 'social distancing' to slow down the spread of the illness. Social distancing means we have to cancel as many social events as we can and limit our contact with other people".
- Acknowledge that it will be hard not to do the things they normally do and validate their feelings of disappointment about missing out on things they like to do.

15-18

Young people in this age group will have their own sources of information and their own opinions.

- Explain that not all websites or memes on the internet are accurate and that information that isn't true spreads on social media so they should ask you if they have any questions.
- Ask them about how they are feeling and what they think of the different stories they have heard.
- Talk with them openly about family decisions and circumstances.
- You can look up things together that you don't understand from reputable sources like the Centers for Disease Control.

For children and young people with Mental Health Concerns

For children and young people who are already prone to anxiety and depression these conversations are even more important. Stressful events in the world and changes in routine can trigger and worsen anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Managing your emotions

Remember that it is always important to take care of yourself and manage your own emotions.

- If you are feeling nervous and uncertain, your children will feel that.
- Talk with other trusted adults about your fears so that you are able to calmly talk with your children about their questions and concerns.
- Children and young people of all ages appreciate knowing that their parents or caregivers are doing all they can to keep them safe and that we can get through hard times by supporting each other.