

How to Address Your Child's Concerns Over COVID-19

During this unprecedented time, children of all ages are experiencing a wide range of new emotions including fear, frustration, and anxiety. Here are a few simple ways to address children's fears over COVID-19.



Best Practices for Children of All Ages

- Get reliable information on COVID-19 from 1 or 2 trusted resources such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
- Focus on the positive and discuss ways people in your community are helping each other.
- Model calmness; your children will look to you to see how to react.
- Listen to your child's feelings, thoughts, concerns, and beliefs and encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Let your child know you are there to help them when they feel anxious, scared, or worried.
- Provide extra positive one-on-one attention.
- Try to maintain normal routines such as bedtimes and meals as much as possible.

Preschool Age Children

- Validate that something different is happening without going into detail – take the lead from your preschooler. Don't insist on talking about it a lot unless they show signs of distress or ask questions.
- Encourage expression of feelings through play, reenactment, and storytelling.
- Play calming and comforting activities before bedtime.
- Avoid media exposure.
- Reassure them that everyone is doing what they can to stay healthy and take care of others.
- Validate and empathize with feelings of frustration or disappointment.

Things You Can Say

- "Right now, there is a rule that friends and 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?"
- "We have to take a break from playing with others so we can all stay healthy."
- "We can't visit with others in person right now, but we can facetime them! I'm sure our friends and family would love to see you virtually."

School Age Children

- Discuss COVID-19 and encourage questions.
- Inform children of actions being taken in the community.
- Encourage expression of feelings through play.
- Spend extra time together and be extra patient.
- Limit media exposure and talk about what children have seen or heard online. Clarify any misinformation and separate rumor from reality.
- Remind children that leaders in your community have made a plan to keep people safe.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings of sadness, frustration or disappointment.

- "It looks like you are feeling sad. When I feel sad a hug or high-five makes me feel better. Would you like a hug or high-five?"
- "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."
- "The leaders in our community have made a plan to stay safe. I am going to help you and our family be safe."
- "We are going to wash our hands for 20 seconds. This will get the germs that could make us sick off our hands. What song do you want to sing?"
- "I see your body has some extra energy today. Do you want to go for a walk or have a dance party?"

Adolescents

- Encourage discussion, learning and critical thinking about COVID-19.
- Limit media exposure and discuss what your teen has seen or heard. Help them understand reliable vs. unreliable sources. Address current stigmas and injustices.
- To redirect your teen's worries, identify things they can do such as helping others in need.
- If it becomes necessary to change plans, be clear, open, and direct with your teen.
- Show teens that it's possible to continue to do what is important to them while practicing healthy behaviors.
- Remind them that anxiety, worry, or sadness is normal.

- "If you don't have the virus, let's find safe ways for you to continue to do what you need and love to do."
- "We can understand the virus better by looking at reliable sources like the CDC. Remember that there is a difference between staying informed and worrying too much. Let's work together to balance the time we're spending online and the time we're spending connecting and doing fun things."
- "While we don't know how long it will take to 'flatten the curve' to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time—we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part."

Sources:

- [Harvard Medical School](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [Zerotothree.org](#)