

Tips for discussing COVID-19 with your child

Don't be afraid to discuss COVID-19 with your children

Most children will have already heard about coronavirus. Parents and carers should take the opportunity to talk to them about the current situation.

Honest and regular communication is key. Not talking about something can make children worry more.

Children often rely on their friends and social media for the news. Parents and carers can help by positioning themselves as a trusted source for information and as a person who can help children with their questions.

Adapt information based on your child's age

Try to remain calm and positive when talking to your child.

Think about your child's age. Offer information using language and examples they'll understand.

It's okay if you can't answer everything – and to say you're not sure. Use this as an opportunity to find out information together. Being available to your child is what matters.

Be careful not to share too much information all at once, as this may be overwhelming.

Avoid talking in a way that could make your child feel more worried.

Be guided by your child

Ask your child to tell you anything they may have heard about COVID-19, and how they feel about this situation.

Check in with your child often. Give them opportunities to ask you questions over the coming weeks and months.

Some children will worry more about others than themselves. Find ways for them to connect with family and friends as much as possible using technology.

Be reassuring. Tell children that the changes in their life have been introduced to make us all safer. Tell them that eventually, things will go back to normal.

Be aware of the language you use with your child while you're around them. Remember that children will be listening to adult conversations more than usual.

Don't dismiss your child's fears. It's understandable for them to be concerned because they have probably never experienced anything like this before.

Tell your child that doctors and scientists all around the world are working really hard to learn more about COVID-19 and to keep us safe.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe

Give them some control over what is happening. Teach the importance of physical distancing, hand washing and how to do these things properly. Remind them of their responsibility to protect others from coughs and sneezing.

Remind them to call [000](tel:000) if they or their family are unsafe.

Stick to a routine

Over the school holidays, structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are still an important part of keeping children happy and healthy.

Where you can, have a daily routine. Create a shared timetable with your family and put it up on the fridge where everyone can see.

If possible, find a time every day to talk about the importance of good hygiene. Teach them the essentials of practicing physical distancing.

Include things like outside time, play time, free time on technology, creative time and learning time.

It is okay to be flexible and respond to the needs and emotional state of your child.

Keep talking

Find out what your child already knows or is worried about. It's important to find out if they have heard incorrect information.

Ask questions that don't have yes or no answers.

If your child asks you something and you don't know the answer, say so. Use the question as a chance to find out together.

If your children don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's okay.

Let them know that we're all going to keep listening and talking.

Close conversation with care

It's important not to leave children feeling worried after a conversation.

When you wrap up your conversations, look for signs they're feeling anxious. This might be a change in their tone of voice, their breathing or body language.

Comfort them if they feel this way.

Things to look out for in your children

It is normal for children and young people to show signs of distress. Common reactions include:

- fear and anxiety
- anger and frustration
- confusion
- sadness
- denial

Remember to look after yourself

This situation can be stressful – regardless of your age. To look after the people you love, you also need to look after yourself. If you notice that you're feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before having a conversation or answering your child's questions.

If you're feeling worried, tell your child that you will find some information and talk to them soon.