



Talking to Children About COVID-19

With schools closing, routines changing and social distancing, your child's life has probably been seriously affected by COVID-19. Understanding the ever-changing information about this virus can be challenging for adults and it can be especially hard for children of all ages to understand. Children can get worried or can build up their own incorrect ideas when they aren't given information that they can understand.

Here are some tips from Child Life Services at Boston Children's Hospital about how to talk to your child about COVID-19.



Help them feel better

- You can help your child be less worried by sharing what adults are doing to help: "Since this is a new illness, doctors, nurses and scientists are learning as much as they can about it. Everything that they learn will be used to keep people safe."
- Validate (agree with) what your child may be feeling. Ask your child what feelings they have instead of telling them not to worry. Help your child to label and identify feelings that may be new or unfamiliar. For example: "Sometimes my belly hurts when I feel nervous" or "Sometimes I start to act silly when I'm scared because I don't know what questions to ask." It's important to let your child know that it is OK to feel this way.



Talk about ways to cope with their feelings

- Think about events in the past that have made your child feel uneasy—was it the first day of school? Trying a new sport? Going to a new place? Brainstorm things that helped them in the past to overcome these fears and feel calm. Some examples might include:
 - Practicing deep breathing
 - Taking a walk
 - Expression through play
 - Drawing a picture or writing in a journal



Talk about ways your child can help stay healthy

- There is plenty that children can do to help cut down on the spread of germs. Give them reminders and talk openly about good hygiene (being clean). Remind them to wash their hands and to keep their hands away from their face. For example: "You might be hearing a lot about washing your hands and you might hear me say it a lot! It's very important that you remember to wash your hands with warm water and soap to help get rid of germs."
- Brainstorm fun songs together that your child can sing while washing their hands for at least 20 seconds.



Give your child the right information for their age and ability to understand

- As parents, we sometimes try to hide information from our children as a way to protect them. Hiding information from children can create worry and allows room for children to make up their own ideas that are likely to be wrong.
- It's important to keep your child's age, development and personality in mind when you share information. Remember, you know your child best!
- Be honest and provide simple, clear explanations: "The coronavirus, or COVID-19, is the name of a virus that is making people sick right now. It's a little like having the flu. It can cause a fever or a cough and can be spread from person to person."



Give your child ways to be in control

- Sudden breaks in routines and daily activities can be very hard for children. They may feel like they are out of control and are not sure about what will happen next, or what they can do about any of it. Think about ways that you can help your child feel a little more in control when everything else feels like it is out of control.
 - Keep routines, like mealtimes and bedtimes, as consistent as possible. This helps create predictability (knowing what will happen and when) throughout the day.
 - Make a list of activities that your child can do throughout the day. Think about activities that you can do together as well as activities that they can do on their own.



Encourage questions and pay attention to your child's behavior

- Be aware of how your child is acting. Behavior is a kind of communication. Some children may act out more when their feelings become too big to handle. Others might become more withdrawn or quiet. Each child may act differently, depending on their age and their development.
- Let your child know that they can come to you with any questions or worries that they have. It is okay if you do not have the answer to all of their questions. Comfort them and let them know that you will share more information with them when you have it.



Schedule time for yourself

- Making your way through times of uncertainty can be stressful and difficult to deal with as an adult. Children will often pick up on the emotions and concerns of a caregiver. If you are upset and anxious on the outside, this can make children feel more worried and raise their anxiety level. It's important to take good care of yourself so that you can take good care of your child.
- Be sure to schedule time for self-care and self-reflection. Think about trying some of the following activities to stay connected with your support system, while also practicing social distancing:
 - Take a short break outside
 - Meditate
 - Schedule phone/video calls with family or friends
 - Exercise
- Using practices to help you stay calm will help you be a supportive source of comfort for your child.

For more information

If you're a Boston Children's patient or family member and you have questions general questions about COVID-19, please call our COVID-19 hotline at 855-281-5730 or 617-355-4200.

Scan QR codes with your phone camera

Visit Boston Children's COVID-19 website:
childrenshospital.org/conditions-and-treatments/conditions/c/coronavirus



Visit the CDC website:
cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

