



## How to Talk With Children About the Coronavirus

Children are naturally curious. The closing of schools affects children directly. As a result, they will likely have many questions about what the virus is, why schools are closed, and why they have limited access to friends and family. When speaking with children it is important to do the following:

- **Reassure** children that you are doing everything that you can to keep them safe.
- Children will respond to what you say and how you say it, so **do your best to stay calm** and remain reassuring.
- **Make sure that children know that they can come to you** when they have questions. Make time to speak with them, and have that time be as uninterrupted as possible.
- **Be honest with them.** When accurate information isn't available, children often think of the worst-case scenario. Don't ignore their concerns, but explain that some people have COVID-19. Let them know that schools are closed to slow the spread of the virus across the state, not necessarily because there are cases in their school.
- **Avoid language that may lead to blame or stigma.** Remind them that the virus can make anyone sick regardless of their race or age.
- **Pay attention to what children hear on the television or radio, and see online.** Make sure to vary what they are seeing and hearing, and encourage them to practice a digitally healthy lifestyle. Too much information focused on COVID-19 can cause children to experience anxiety or panic.
- **Teach children everyday actions to stop the spread of germs,** like how to wash their hands and appropriate social distancing behavior.
- **Provide information that is honest, accurate and age appropriate.** Make sure that you have conversations about things other than the Coronavirus.
- **Keep a consistent schedule.** Regular meals, bedtimes and activities can help children to feel safe and secure.
- **Explore online learning opportunities.** Some schools will be offering classes online, and some vendors like Audible are offering audio recordings of select children's books for free during the outbreak. Check your school district for more information.
- **Keep yourself and your family safe** by staying home when you're sick, covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, washing your hands often with soap and

# Mental Health and Social Supports



water and cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects. Let children know that they play a very important role in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

- **Keep yourself informed.** Your child’s school district should be providing regular communication with families. This includes calls, emails, text messages and other methods that they already use to communicate. If you’re not hearing from your district during a closure, get in touch with your school principal or district superintendent. Stay informed with COVID-19 updates from [the Department of Health](#), [the World Health Organization](#), the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control](#) and your [local health department](#).
- **Have fun!** Do things that make your family feel better in times of stress, such as watching movies, reading or playing games.

## Keep Explanations Age Appropriate

- **Early elementary school children** need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”
- **Upper elementary and early middle school children** may be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.
- **Upper middle school and high school students** are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts such as state and local health authorities. Provide honest, accurate and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.
- **High school seniors** are uniquely affected by school closures. They may experience fear and anxiety about unfinished classes and assignments, unmet college admission requirements and paying tuition. These concerns may feel overwhelming and cause strong emotions in students and their families. Many seniors and their families feel they have “lost” some of the best parts of their senior year, and many end-of-year senior traditions and rites of passage remain in question.

# Mental Health and Social Supports

## What to Emphasize When Talking to Children

- Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.
- Not everyone will get the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
- It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.
- Kids play an important role in keeping the Coronavirus from spreading.
- There are things you can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading the disease:
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - Stay home when you are sick.
  - Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water (20 seconds).
  - If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer (60–95% alcohol based).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Practice safe social distancing by remaining 6 feet apart from others and gathering in groups of less than 10 people.

## Here are some other resources

- [NPR Cartoon – Just for Kids](#)
- [Parent/Caregiver Guide To Helping Families Cope With The Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Helping Children Cope](#)
- Resource for young children in numerous languages: [COVIBOOK](#)