

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

# Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children

As public conversations around coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family, and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. CDC has created guidance to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

### General principles for talking to children

#### Remain calm and reassuring.

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

#### Make yourself available to listen and to talk.

- Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.

#### Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.

- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

#### Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

#### Provide information that is honest and accurate.

- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

#### Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
- Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff. (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities)
- Get children into a handwashing habit.
  - Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
  - If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in schools and childcare facilities.