

Talking to Children about Coronavirus: Eight Steps for a Successful Conversation

1. Consult the [CDC website](#). Make sure you know the correct facts about coronavirus, including the following:
 - How the illness is spread (respiratory droplets)
 - Why the virus is receiving so much of our attention (global pandemic, severity)
 - How we can prevent spread of the illness (handwashing, cleaning, social distancing)
2. Plan a good time to talk with the child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Try to plan a time when there are few other distractions.
3. Before you initiate the discussion, reflect on your own feelings, including any feelings of anxiety that may carry into your discussion. Consider practicing so that you can use calm, reassuring, and factual statements when sharing information.
4. Open your discussion by asking the child what they know about coronavirus.
5. Present information about coronavirus in a way the child can understand, using language appropriate for their age. If necessary, be prepared to explain different terms in multiple ways.
6. Ask the child to repeat things back to you to verify understanding, or to see what things you may need to explain again in a different way.
7. Remind the child of a past, successful experience engaging in a healthy habit like doing their homework, limiting their intake of candy, or going to sleep on time. Express confidence in their ability to engage in active practices to prevent disease.
8. Ask the child if they have any other questions or feelings that they would like to discuss. Emphasize that you are available to talk or answer questions whenever they need to talk.

Remember:

- It is okay to say that you do not know the answer to a specific question and that you will find out and follow up with the correct answer later.
- Be careful that you do not spin the truth or over-generalize to make information less scary. Instead, use facts to reassure the child and model a calm response. The goal of these conversations is to help children understand what is happening, educating and empowering them.

▶ Coronavirus is a new virus that is like a really bad cold.



When sick people cough or sneeze, the virus is within small drops that escape the mouth and nose. Those drops can land on a surface. They can also land on our face if we are talking with the sick person closely. We can get the virus from another person if the small drops come into our mouth, nose, or eyes. This is why we move our head to the side when talking with someone who is coughing or sneezing. We wash our hands and try not to touch our face in case we touch a surface where those drops have landed. By washing our hands, we make sure we don't have the virus on our hands and are less likely to bring the virus into our nose, mouth, or eyes.

Some child-friendly definitions might include:

- **Virus:** A type of germ. A virus is very tiny and when it gets inside a body, it can make the body sick.
- **Infection:** When you have gotten the virus
- **Disease:** An illness that keeps the body from working normally.
- **Transmission:** The passing of something on, from one person to another
- **Social distancing:** Avoiding groups of people so that sick people don't accidentally pass the virus to healthy people. Your school might be temporary closed in order to practice social distancing.

- Depending upon the age of the child, it may not be helpful to provide detailed statistics like infection rate and mortality rate, as these may be too abstract to fully understand. It may cause more anxiety due to misunderstanding and generalization.
- Be careful not to connect the virus itself with any particular group of people based on race, ethnicity, or nationality. Some children may have heard that the outbreak began in China, or that some countries have more cases than others. Clarify that this has nothing to do with the people themselves, and that we all can practice safe and healthy behaviors to avoid spreading germs.
- Children who are sensitive to heightened emotion, changes in daily routine, or anxiety may need additional support. Familiarize yourself with the resources and policies available to children in your school or community.



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