

# Talking to Kids about Coronavirus

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During this unprecedented time, it's hard to know exactly how to explain to children what's going on. When their routine has been thoroughly disrupted and tensions are high, it does more harm to not let them know why things have changed so much. It may feel hard to find the balance between keeping them in the loop and overwhelming them with information, so these articles have outlined the best ways to talk to your children about the coronavirus.

## For Parents

Information compiled from the [CDC](#), [Sesame Street](#), [Child Mind Institute](#), and [Dr. Laura Markham](#)  
**Initiating Conversation**

- Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus; not talking about it can make kids worry more.
- Ask children what they've heard about it so you can respond reassuringly to any fears they may have and correct rumors that aren't true.
  - Keep your tone simple and straightforward- "Hey, what have you heard about the coronavirus?"

- Be prepared to answer the same question multiple times; repeating the same question can be how kids express their concerns.
- Ask them how they feel, and let them know that their feelings are okay. Lots of people are feeling those feelings, too! Name your own feelings- sad, anxious, etc.
- You can take a moment to think about how to answer questions before responding, and be honest if you don't know the answer to a question.
  - You can tell them "That's a good question. I'm not sure what the answer is. Let me find out for you!" Look up the answer without your child there, so you can take the time to frame the information in a reassuring way once you have the facts.
- Always start by listening; don't say much except to acknowledge your child's worries- "Wow! That's a scary idea- that everyone is dying of this virus. It must have frightened you to hear that."
- Then matter-of-factly correct any untrue information- "Happily, it's not true that everyone who gets this virus dies; in fact, most people get something like a mild flu and recover quickly."
- Respect children's concerns; don't dismiss their fears, but remain reassuring and affirming.
- Trust your instincts; you know your child best. Children of different ages will have different questions and needs, and a range of responses is normal.

### Setting the Tone

- Don't discuss coronavirus with your child when you're feeling anxious and stressed out; wait until you're feeling calm. Children will pick up cues from your own emotional responses and from the conversation you have with them.
- Listen carefully to your child's question and be developmentally appropriate. Keep in mind that less information is best- they want their question answered, but more information than necessary can be overwhelming and may raise new concerns.
- Your goal is to communicate that:
  - You are safe.
  - Grownups have got this covered.
  - Children and adults with healthy immune systems can fight off this virus, so many people who get it will just get something like the flu.
  - Lots of smart, capable scientists and health workers are keeping the virus contained.
  - Our job now is to make sure we don't spread the virus by washing our hands.
  - The big changes (like school closing) are actually a good thing because they're keeping us safe!
  - We're going to be helpers by staying home as much as possible, so we'll create a new routine that works for us.
- Empathize with how hard it is not to know what is going to happen. Help kids come up with a way to reassure themselves- something along the lines of "My job is to wash my hands and to not touch my face and to enjoy being home from school. My parents' job is to keep our family safe from germs by keeping us home. If I do get the virus, it will be like having the flu. We can handle this."

- Remind children that people can get sick from all kinds of germs, but what's important to remember is that if you do get sick, the adults at home will help get you any help that you need.
  - Tell children that the grown-ups who keep us healthy, like doctors and nurses, are doing their job and working very hard to help people stay safe and healthy.
- Make yourself available to listen and to talk, and be sure your children know they can come to you when they have questions or need to talk.
- Keep talking; express that you will keep them updated and that lines of communication are always open.
- Remind kids that this situation won't last forever.

### “What Do We Do?”

- Focus on what they can do to stay safe; remind them that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after using the bathroom, after going outside, before they eat, and after they sneeze, cough, or blow their nose. Remind kids to cough and sneeze into their elbow, not into their hands or into the air.
  - Keep a sense of humor rather than alarm when reminding kids to wash hands and not touch their face; this can help prevent kids developing a sense of anxiety over their healthy habits and instead feel empowered by following them.
- Emphasize ways that kids can help others during this time: making thank-you cards for health workers, giving allowance money to organizations helping fight coronavirus, letting them help wipe down surfaces, video calling with elderly relatives and neighbors who might be isolated, and more.

### Keep in Mind

- Be aware that your child might be concerned that you (or other family members) could die. These fears may show themselves through “tests”- acting out, fears of being left alone in a room or with a babysitter, nightmares and bedwetting, meltdowns over small issues, etc. Set calm, patient limits on behavior and address the source directly. You could say something like, “You seem to be having a hard time lately. I know that some kids are worried about their parents, with this virus going around. I want you to know that I am taking very good care of myself. I wear hygienic gloves to touch the ATM machine and at the store. I work hard not to touch my face so the virus can't infect me. I eat healthily so my immune system is in good shape. I expect to live until I am a very old person -- you will be all grown up and have children of your own and I will be their grandparent!”
- Don't allow children to watch the news, which is purposely designed to keep us engaged by scaring us. Every time a child overhears the news discussing the new death toll or number of people infected will increase their fear and anxiety. Instead, try to engage in uplifting, lighthearted activities when kids are around; save the news for reading on your own or watching when children are out of earshot.
  - Watching and hearing too much news can be taxing on adults too; take care of yourself during this time!

# For Kids

## *I Have A Question About Coronavirus* by Arlen Grad Gaines and Meredith Englander Polsky

[https://28638781-c0c7-460f-81ae-fa6eba3486b9.filesusr.com/ugd/517d15\\_915f31f39df449a2837c11862a7ab39c.pdf](https://28638781-c0c7-460f-81ae-fa6eba3486b9.filesusr.com/ugd/517d15_915f31f39df449a2837c11862a7ab39c.pdf)

This is a short illustrated e-book written by two women who are social workers and parents. It uses SymbolStix illustrations, which are frequently used in special education to convey the message of the story, making it more accessible. This e-book uses straightforward language to discuss the virus and the way kids may feel about it and the change in their routines. There is a condensed version that matches the pictures with the parts of the story being told for kids to re-read to themselves independently if they'd like, or for children who need a shorter version. There are also suggestions for parents at the end. For more information about the book, you can read this article: <https://www.washingtonian.com/2020/03/23/these-maryland-social-workers-wrote-a-childrens-book-to-answer-coronavirus-questions/>

## *COVIBOOK* by Manuela Molina

English version: [https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685\\_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf](https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf)

Link to 22 other versions in different languages: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

This short book was created to support and reassure children under the age of seven, and is not a scientific resource but tool based on fantasy. Molina encourages its use as an invitation for family discussions about emotions arising from the current situation, and suggests printing out the PDF so children can color and write in the sections that invite them to do so.

# Article Links

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019"](#)

[Sesame Street: "Talking to Children About COVID-19"](#)

[Dr. Laura Markham \(Aha! Parenting\): "What to Say To Your Child About the Coronavirus- and How To Cope As a Parent"](#)

[Child Mind Institute: "Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus"](#)