

**Dear Families,**

**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. The CDC has created guidance to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.**

**Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm. It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.**

**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.**

- **Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.**
- **What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.**
- **If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.**
- **Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.**
- **Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.**

**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.**

- **Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.**
- **It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.**
- **Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.**

**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.**

- **When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone.**
- **It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.**
- **Bullying or negative comments made toward others should be stopped and reported to the school.**
- **Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different from the values that you have at home.**

**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.**

- **Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.**
- **Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.**
- **Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.**
- **Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.**
- **Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.**
- **Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.**

**Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.**

- **Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.**
- **Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.**

**Provide information that is honest and accurate. Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child. In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.**

- **Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.**
- **Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.**
- **It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to protect yourself.**

- For additional factual information contact your doctor or check the <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> website.

### **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 will 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. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

### **Know the symptoms of COVID-19.**

- The CDC believes these symptoms appear in a few days after being exposed to someone with the disease or as long as 14 days after exposure:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Shortness for breath
  - For some people the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they are quite severe or even life threatening. In either case it is important to check with your child’s healthcare provider (or yours) and follow instructions about staying home or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

### **Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection.**

- Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spread of illness:
  - Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds (singing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star slowly takes about 20 seconds).
- Cover their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough and throw away the tissue immediately, or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Do not share food or drinks.

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

**Try to keep information simple and remind them that health and school officials are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.**

**Communicate with your school.**

- **Let your school know if your child is sick and keep them home. Your school may ask if your child has a fever or not. This information will help the school to know why your child was kept home. If your child is diagnosed with COVID-19, let the school know so they can communicate with and get guidance from local health authorities.**
- **Talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker if your child is having difficulties as a result of anxiety or stress related to COVID-19. They can give guidance and support to your child at school.**
- **Make sure to follow all instructions from your school.**

**Resources:**

**[Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)**

**[Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#)**

**[Coping with Stress during infectious disease outbreaks](#)**

**[CDC -Coronavirus 2019](#)**

**[World Health Organization Advice to the public](#)**

**[Just for Kids- Youtube on explanation of Corona- Gr. 2 and up](#)**

**[Talking to Kids about Cov8d19 from the National School Nurses Organization \(in multiple languages\)](#)**

**[What Kids Want To Know About Coronavirus: An Original Comic : Goats and Soda](#)**

**[Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)**

**[How to Talk to Your Kids About Coronavirus](#)**

**Sincerely,**

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