

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS TO TALK WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

When talking to children about Coronavirus (COVID-19), it is important for parents to use developmentally-appropriate explanations tailored to the child's age, verbal ability, and cognitive understanding. Suggestions for talking to children of different ages about coronavirus are provided below.

Help children of all ages understand basic information about what the coronavirus is and why it is currently such an important topic.

Explain What Coronavirus Is

Help children of all ages understand basic information about what the coronavirus is and why it is currently such an important topic. In addition, explain what coronavirus is NOT. For example, children or certain groups of people should not be blamed for it. Although it is serious, it is not something to panic about.

Preschoolers

“Coronavirus is a new germ. Germs can spread from one person to another and make them sick.”

“If Maria has the germ and coughs on Sebastian, then Sebastian could get the germ. Then, Sebastian could spread the germ to his family and friends by sneezing near them.”

“Not everyone has the germ, so don't be scared. People are working on medicines to kill the germ, but this can take a long time.”

School-age children

“Coronavirus is a new germ that spreads from person-to-person like a cold. Most people just feel like they have a cold, but some people have trouble breathing and get other serious symptoms.”

“Because coronavirus is caused by a new germ, scientists don't have a medication to treat it yet but they are working on it. This may take a long time — maybe several months or even a year.”

Teenagers

“Where did you hear about coronavirus? What do you already know about it? Do you have any questions?”

“Coronavirus is a new virus, or one that humans haven't experienced yet. So, it is harder for some people to fight it off with our immune systems.”

“The precautions we are taking now, like staying away from friends or not going to parties, will help prevent the virus from spreading. Even if you don't get sick from the virus, it's possible that you could spread it to others in the community or in our family, like grandma.”

“Scientists are working on medications to treat coronavirus, but it could take several months until they find one.”

Explain How We Protect Ourselves

Help children understand that proper hygiene (e.g., thoroughly washing hands, coughing and sneezing into elbows instead of hands, avoiding touching one's face), maintaining a healthy diet, and good sleep habits are critical to preventing the spread of coronavirus. In addition, it is important to explain the reason why we need to maintain physical distance to avoid contagion.

Preschoolers

“When we sing the alphabet song together while we wash our hands, we make sure we wash long enough to get rid of any germs.”

“Let's practice coughing into our elbow and waving at each other so we don't spread our germs to others.”

School-age children

“We make it harder for the germ to spread by washing our hands often, coughing into our elbows, and not touching other people.”

Continued

“We also need to wash our hands after touching things that other people touch often, like door handles, elevator buttons, and grocery carts.”

“To help stop the spread of the germ, we need to avoid close contact with other people, including our friends and other family members. This is why school is closed and your activities are cancelled. We all have to do our part to help keep the entire community safe and healthy.”

Teenagers

“Coronavirus spreads more easily than other viruses, so we need to wash our hands more frequently, especially after coming into contact with surfaces in public spaces, such as door handles, elevator buttons, gas pumps, and ATMs.”

“Now more than ever, everyone needs to cough into their elbows and avoid physical contact with others; it is extremely important to prevent the spread of the virus. We have to do our part so that others who are at-risk do not get sick.”

“Even though it is a pain, we have to stay physically separated from friends for now. Are you able to connect with your friends and classmates online?”

Explain How We Protect People Who are at Risk

Help children understand that certain populations are at high risk and we, as a community, need to take especially good care of them.

Preschoolers

“Even though the germ won’t hurt you, it could hurt older people like Grandma and Grandpa.”

“The more we stay inside, the safer people like Grandma and Grandpa will be.”

School-age children

“This new germ does not usually make people your age very sick, but it can be very dangerous for older people and people who have other illnesses.”

“The less physical contact we have with other people, the less likely older and sick people are to get the germ, and the safer they will be.”

Teenagers

“Although coronavirus is less likely to make young people like you very sick, you can still spread the virus to others who are more vulnerable to it and could get very sick or even die, such as older adults and individuals with other illnesses that cause them to have weakened immune systems.”

“I know you want to hang out with your friends, but we need to stay indoors as much as possible. This will protect friends and loved ones like your grandparents who are more likely to get very sick from the virus.”