

# TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

News of the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is everywhere – from television stations and neighborhood streets to the school playground. As public discussions about coronavirus increase, children may worry about themselves, family, and friends becoming ill and will rely on the adults around them to help make sense of this global pandemic. While shielding children from the news may feel like the best way to protect them during these hectic times, research shows that children tend to worry more when they are kept in the dark about what's going on around them. 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 open, sincere, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear.



**Before you talk to your child, there are some dos and don'ts to keep in mind.**

## **1 Be developmentally appropriate.**

How you talk to your child about coronavirus will depend on their age. If they are in the Pre-K to 1st grade range, for example, you may want to use diagrams or pictures to explain complex details. Videos are also a great way to explain the virus for any age group. No matter their age, don't volunteer too much information, as this may overwhelm them. Take your cues from your child by inviting them to share what they already know or have heard and how it makes them feel. Ask them what questions they have and do your best to answer them openly, honestly, and clearly without instilling fear.

## **2 Remain calm and reassuring.**

As humans, we react to both what we hear and how it is said. Your child will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others, so stay calm and let them know that everything will be alright. Check in often with your child and let them know they can come to you with any questions. Never avoid the subject as this can create unnecessary fear.

## **3 Be transparent.**

If you don't know something, it's okay to say so. Consider looking up information together as a way to build literacy and research skills, and to model that when you don't know something, you seek out information to help find answers. This can be a great way to bond and will help foster trust between you and your child.

## **4 Avoid language that blames or stigmatizes others.**

When talking to your child, remind them that no one person or group is to blame for the spread of coronavirus. Avoid making assumptions about who might have coronavirus and why they have it. Remember, viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of their race or ethnicity, where they live, how much money they have, etc.

## **5 Pay attention to what your child is watching on television or online.**

During these times when students are home from school, it may be tempting to give your child a little more screen time than usual to engage them. However, there is a ton of misinformation about coronavirus, and too much information on one topic can lead to fear and anxiety. Limit the amount of time your child spends watching TV or playing on their digital devices, and be sure to talk to them about how some of the stories they hear on the Internet, social media, and from their friends may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

## 6 Make it fun.

For your younger children especially, find ways to keep the topic light and fun. Consider making a game out of handwashing or cleaning surfaces (e.g., you are all germ-busters protecting the world from viruses). You can draw or paint visuals of what they think the virus looks like and conduct research on the anatomy of a virus, for instance.

## 7 Stick to a routine.

It seems like news about the coronavirus changes by the hour. With this much uncertainty, it is important that you stick to your daily routines as much as possible while staying safe. This is especially important if your child's daycare or school shuts down. Routines help to maintain some sense of normalcy and will help your child cope even if things feel a little crazy. Here is a sample schedule adapted from Khan Academy.

Time	Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd Grade	3rd-5th Grade	6th-8th Grade	High School
8-9 am	Breakfast and Getting Ready: encourage students to keep the routine of dressing for a school day			
9:00-9:30 am	Math Packets <i>Online math activities</i>	Math Packets <i>Online math activities</i>		
9:30-9:45 am	Play - ideally outside if weather permits	Shorter Break: 15 mins		
9:45-10 am				
10:00-10:30 am	Reading time - with parent or sibling if available	Reading Packets <i>Online reading activities</i>	Reading Packets <i>Online reading activities</i> Silent Reading	
10:30-11 am	Respond to Reading: write or draw	Silent Reading		
11:00-11:30 am	Break - ideally run around and play outside	Shorter Break: 15 mins		
		Grammar Work		
11:30 am-12:00 pm	Phonics or Grammar <i>Online reading activities</i>	Writing or Journaling with Prompts		
12-1 pm	Lunch			
1-2 pm	Science and Social Studies Online Activities (see suggestions below)			
2:00-2:30 pm	Free time: hobbies, exploring new things	Walk/Yoga/Exercise App or Website (see suggestions below)		
2:30-3:30 pm	Enrichment activity: coding class, art, baking, craft-making			

Reading and math instruction and activity packets can be found at <http://i-ready.com/athome>.

Remember, knowledge is power. Having frank discussions with your children about the coronavirus will not only ease their mind, but also arm them with the information they need to protect themselves during this time. Even though we don't have all of the answers right now, we do know how to reduce the spread of germs, so in the meantime, do the following:

- Remind your child to stay away from people who are coughing, sneezing, or sick.
- Model for your child how 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, school closings)
- Get children into the habit of washing their hands often. 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; going outside; and before preparing food or eating. You can make handwashing fun for your young child by asking them to sing their ABCs at least once or twice through as they wash. They may also use hand sanitizer, which should contain at least 60% alcohol, if soap and water are not available. Be sure to supervise your young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol.