

How to Explain the Coronavirus Situation to Children?

The constant news updates on all media, the talk on the street and at home all inundate our children with information about the coronavirus pandemic. Our children don't always know how to deal with such complex information. It can be scary and cause anxiety. This is how you can help them deal with everything and talk about their feelings and fears.



Why you should talk about the Coronavirus with your children?

When you talk about difficult subjects, you're helping your children deal with life's difficulties. Also, if your child doesn't understand the facts in a way that's age appropriate, they might imagine things that are worse than the truth. If you encourage open communication about difficult topics, your child will understand that he/she can always talk to you. **They'll understand that you'll be there and listen to them if something is bothering them.**

Before you start talking

You might think that if you talk about the coronavirus and its possible implications, you'll upset your children. Actually, they'll probably be happy to share what they've been thinking and how they have been feeling. The way you deal with the topic needs to be age appropriate and tailored to your child's developmental stage.

For example, **if your child is a toddler or in kindergarten**, it is best to wait for them to bring the topic up. However, be aware of what they hear or see on TV, on the internet or from their older siblings. This way, you'll have a better idea of what might be bothering them.

If your child is in school, they may have heard scary things from friends or in class. You can choose to bring up the subject before they ask, especially if there is a change in their behavior or if something has happened in their close surroundings such as a classmate in isolation or someone they know who has been infected.

As soon as your child is old enough to be interested in **different media venues**, they'll start reading the news, showing interest in current events, celebrity gossip and discussions across social media. Even if these things do not interest you, you should be familiar with the "hot" topics, such as a celebrity in isolation or one who has the coronavirus. This way, you'll know more or less what your children are hearing, and the things they want to talk about won't catch you by surprise. If you bring up some of the issues yourselves, you can guide them when it comes to more complex issues.

Tips for how to have challenging conversations

You should think of some of the more difficult issues before your child asks about them. This way, you'll be prepared when one of them comes up. Here are some ideas that can help you have these conversations:

- If something sad or scary has happened in your family, **your child needs to hear it from you first**. The same goes for events that may have an effect on them, for example, isolation or the hospitalization of a parent or a sibling. Make time to speak to your child the way that's best for them.
- When you're the one bringing up the difficult issues, you can **choose a time** when you and your child are calm and relaxed. Also, you can choose a private place where you know your child will feel comfortable.
- **Explain things simply** and take the child's age into account. For example, you can tell a two-year-old, "now we need to stay home and not go out. We'll find fun things to do together". You can give a seven-year-old a little more information. For example, "the coronavirus is a very contagious virus, especially for older people. To avoid a lot of people getting sick and to keep ourselves healthy, we're staying at home until we see the virus isn't infecting people anymore".
- **Be honest** and speak to your children as openly and as accurately as possible. For example, "the virus is dangerous and can cause serious disease, but in most cases even if someone gets sick they get better after a few days or weeks".
- **Come back to the subject after some time has passed**. Your children need time to process. Make it clear to them that they can ask you questions. If your child hasn't brought it up again after a week, you should bring it up yourselves
- **Listen**. After you've started the conversation, really listen to your child. Make eye contact and talk to them at eye level. You should resonate their feelings and repeat them back to them to see if they understood what you said. Different children react differently. There's no right or wrong reaction. Your child might not react immediately, but take some time to process what you said.
- **Stay calm**. Your child will likely mirror your reaction to sad or difficult issues, so it's best to stay calm. Still, it's ok to express emotions and allow your kids to see them.

Use a game to help process feelings and thoughts

Games allow children to express their emotions and deal with them. It might be easier for them to express their feelings if they're the ones making the decision. Let them choose what to play and how to play. Your child can explore their feelings through:

- Arts and crafts- coloring and drawing
- Music- they can listen to music, jump around and express themselves through movement
- A "dirty" game, like playing with sand or mud in the back yard
- Playing with dolls or toys
- Dress-up

Remember, there is nothing like leading by example!

If your children hear you having an emotional, honest conversation about the things you're going through, with them or with other grown-ups, they'll learn how to do the same.

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