

# Helping your kids cope with coronavirus

3/17/2020 by Jennifer Rodemeyer, MA, CCLS

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a source of daily conversation. It can be a scary time for kids, and you may be wondering how to support and help them understand what's happening. These tips can help you help your kids cope through this experience.



## **Define terms about COVID-19.**

Kids are hearing about it all the time. Take time to sit down with your child to define what COVID-19 is, using language appropriate for their development. Start by asking your child, "What do you think coronavirus or COVID-19 is?" This gives you an understanding of what they know, think they know or how they interpret the illness. As you talk, here's how you can help explain the situation:

### **Coronavirus or COVID-19**

is a virus. A virus is so tiny, you can't see it, and it can cause a person's body to feel sick. The reason you are hearing so much about this virus, is because it's one our world hasn't seen before. Every day we're learning about it and ways to stop it from spreading through research. Experts around the world are working hard every day to learn about this virus and how to keep people safe.

Most people who have COVID-19 say they have a cough, fever, chills (feeling cold) and body aches. The most common way the virus can enter a person's body is from their hands — and then touching their mouth or their eyes. That's why it's important to wash your hands often, especially before touching your mouth or your eyes.

When people have coronavirus, or possibly have come in contact with others who have the illness, they're being asked to remain in

### **quarantine.**

Quarantine means to stay in your house and not be in places or spaces with people other than your family.

To help prevent coronavirus from spreading, we're being asked to

### **social distance**

ourselves from one another. This means when we're outside our home, we shouldn't come into close contact with others. Pretend there is a bike separating you and the person you are standing by. Keep that distance away from people other than your family. Right now, instead of giving high fives, fist bumps or hugs to people outside your family, we can smile and wave to say hello.

## **Control your child's access to news and social media about coronavirus.**

Explain to your child there are many conflicting resources about the virus, so you're going to monitor and limit their access to external media for now. Reassure them you'll share any new information you learn that they should know. As a caregiver, use reliable sources such as the

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

, [World Health Organization](#)

, [Mayo Clinic](#)

, your state health department, communication from your school district, etc., to gather your facts. Be aware of your child's presence when watching or listening to the news. Even though they may not appear to be paying attention, they may be listening and internalizing the information they hear.

## **Explain the importance of good hand washing.**

Bring your child to a sink and practice washing your hands together. Show them how to "create tiny bubbles" by rubbing their hands back and forth and how to get the soap between all spaces, even to the ends of their fingers. Encourage your child to sing an entire song such as "Happy Birthday" twice while they wash their hands, so they can be sure they're spending enough time getting their hands clean.

Hang a sign, such as "Welcome home. Please remember to wash your hands", on your front door. This reminds them to wash their hands when they get home.

Remind them to wash before meals, after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing.

**When events are being canceled, explain how this will help prevent the spread of coronavirus.**

Young children may see canceling an event, a family vacation, school, going to the movies, etc., as a result of something they've done wrong. Explain that the reason you're not able to attend the event is to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, especially with large groups of people. If it's an option, share with your child future plans to attend the event after you know it's safe for everyone.

**Remind your child when they're under someone else's care, to listen to them.**

It's important to tell them to follow directions and instructions from those who are responsible for them when you're not there, such as a grandparent, a daycare provider or teacher. Directions they give, such as practicing good handwashing, social distancing, covering your mouth with your sleeve when you cough or sneeze, are practices to protect them and keep them safe.

**Create new home routines as a family.**

Setting up and keeping routines help kids predict what's planned, allowing them to feel in control. Use a white board or paper to display a daily schedule at home. Explain that if social distancing continues to be encouraged, the new norm is going to be staying at home. Identifying clear expectations for the day will support and encourage kids to feel accomplished and like they're helping. When making a schedule, consider activities, such as wake-up/bedtime, meals, school/learning, exercise/outdoor, play and household responsibilities.

**PLAY, PLAY, PLAY.**

Kids learn and process through play. Take advantage of being asked to stay home/social distance, to engage together as a family. Play games, play with toys, put together puzzles, read books, listen to/play music, dance, take family hikes and work on an art project together. For evening times, establish family fun nights, such as movie nights, cooking nights, game nights and ice cream nights. Even though being stuck at home may seem out of the norm, consider this an opportunity for your family to make good memories.

**Connect with loved ones and friends with electronic devices.**

During social isolation, call or FaceTime grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends you normally would engage with. This will help children not feel as isolated as they maintain and build relationships with their loved ones.

Set up a virtual playdate with your child's friend. Kids can be fulfilled from watching others play. Children can also engage in the same activity by virtually playing with each other, also known as parallel play.

Virtual connections are also a way to support their social development through interacting with others.

**If your child becomes sick, reassure them.**

Remind them you, or someone who is caring for them, will keep a close watch on their body at all times. Reassure them you'll be in close contact with your medical provider if you feel medical advice is needed, and that the doctor or nurse will give instructions to help you care for them.

**If your child hears of a friend or a loved one who becomes infected with coronavirus, reassure them.**

Let them know the friend or loved one has received medical advice, and they are being told how to help their body during their illness. As a family, send the person who is recovering a note through the mail. You could have your child draw a picture or write a story to add to your note. This lets them know you're thinking about them and a way for your child to feel they're helping their loved one or friend by bringing joy into their day.

**Be honest with your kids.**

As a parent, it may go against your instinct to tell the truth because at times you may feel what you are sharing may cause fear, worry, anxiety or sadness. Being honest with your child and telling them you're going to be honest, builds trust between you. Remind them you'll keep them posted and update them when information changes or new information arises about coronavirus. This way, as new information comes up, they're hearing it from you.

Have these conversations daily:

This will give them the chance to ask you questions or help them process their concerns.

Let your child know how you feel about COVID-19 to validate how they're feeling. You may feel challenged because of your own questions, concerns or worries.

It's important to let your child know that you're following the guidance of our leaders.

Remind them we're all doing things to help prevent the spread of the virus and to help keep our bodies safe.

As a caregiver, you are your child's biggest support and advocate. You have the ability to make a significant difference on how your child copes through this ever-changing experience.

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