

March 17, 2020

Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

A Parent Resource from the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Nurses

Take Time to Talk

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient, children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions. When sharing information, it is important to make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves.

Information is rapidly changing about this new virus – to have the most correct information stay informed by accessing the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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.

Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children

1. Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.
2. Not everyone will get the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
3. It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.

There are things you can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading the disease:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash hands often with soap and water (20 seconds).
- If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer (60-95% alcohol based).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.