

Talking to Children about COVID-19

Children pick up on grownup feelings. When children have questions, it is important for your responses to be honest and developmentally appropriate for your child. This sometimes can be a tricky balance. Here are some suggestions to help you have that conversation.

Common questions

How should I explain COVID-19 to my children?

First, don't feel you have to explain unless they ask or show signs of concern. Some children may not want or need more information. If children ask or show concern, provide accurate, simple information appropriate for your child.

How should I reassure my child if they're worried they will get sick?

Empathize with children's feelings, and let them know you care. Let your child know that lots of people are working hard to help. Model and support healthy ways of coping with big feelings.

How should I ease my child's fears about others getting sick?

Address children's concerns but don't overshare. Give small doses of information at a time. Respond to the questions and fears they express, but stop sharing once they are satisfied.

How should I respond when my child is anxious?

Invite children to share what they're feeling, and really listen. Use open invitations to encourage talk, like "Tell me about that." Offer comfort through your words and actions. They may need more affection than they usually do. Talk about your schedule regularly to reinforce predictability.

How should I manage my own feelings when talking to children?

It is okay for children to know that grownups have feelings too. Use this opportunity to model healthy expression of feelings and productive coping strategies.

You might say...

COVID-19/coronavirus is a virus, which is a type of germ, that has made a lot of people sick. It is a new kind of virus that people have never had before. Doctors and scientists know that most people will be OK, especially kids, but some people might get very sick. I'm really glad there are doctors and scientists working hard to help people learn about it and stay healthy.

I'm sorry you're feeling scared. That's not a good feeling, is it? Doctors and scientists know that this virus usually doesn't make kids very sick. Some kids might not feel sick at all! I don't think that will happen but if it does, doctors and I will take good care of you. We can help ourselves not get sick by washing our hands really well, not touching our faces, and giving lots of space to others.

I know you really love your Nana. I'm sorry you're feeling worried about her. Most grownups who get the virus feel sick, and then get better again. If Nana gets sick, adults like her family and her doctors will help her. How about we write Nana a letter? I bet that would make her feel really good.

Things are different right now, aren't they? What do you think about that? I like having more time with you, but it's also hard to be apart from others. What is a part you don't like? Yeah, I miss going to the playground too. When we have outside time today, would you like to ride your bike or go on a walk?

Wow, I notice that I'm starting to feel really tight in my body. I'm going to take a big breath and count to ten. That really helps me when I'm worried.