

Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)

Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events such as the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. Parents, caregivers and teachers play an important role in reassuring children as they will react to and follow their verbal and non-verbal cues. Staying informed and up to date on the latest news will make it easier for people to engage in conversations with children as well as provide reassurance.

Children need factual, age-appropriate information about COVID-19 so they feel informed and in control. They need to know how they can play a part in avoiding infection and the spread of virus. They also need to feel that they can discuss their fears and have them addressed.

Source: <https://education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/pastoral-care-and-wellbeing/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-coronavirus/>

General Principles for Talking to Children

Remain calm and reassuring

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

Make yourself available to listen and to talk

- Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.

Avoid language that might blame others and lead to [stigma](#)

- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

Provide information that is honest and accurate

- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
- Remind them 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)
- Get children into a handwashing habit.
 - 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; and before eating or preparing food.
 - If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in schools and childcare facilities.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

Helping Children Cope

Children may respond differently to an outbreak depending upon their age. Below are some reactions according to age and the best ways you can respond.

Age Group	Reactions	How to Help	Self-care ideas
Preschool	Fear of being alone, bad dreams Speech difficulties Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed wetting Change in appetite Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors	Be patience and tolerant Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime Maintain regular family routines Avoid media exposure	Encourage positive activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playing games, • crafts, • go for a walk, • read together, • build a fort, • play outdoors, • play with a pet
School-Age (ages 6-12)	Irritability, Whining, aggressive behavior Clinging, nightmares Sleep/appetite disturbance Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest Competition for parents' attention	Patience, tolerance, and reassurance Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and internet Regular exercise and stretching Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games) Participate in structured household chores Set gentle but firm limits Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions, include what is being done in the family and community	Encourage positive activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playing games, • go for a walk, • read, • engage in hobbies and crafts, • bake with an adult, • play cards, • play with a pet

	Forgetfulness about chores and new information learning at school	<p>Encourage expression through play and conversation</p> <p>Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</p>	
Adolescents (age 13-18)	<p>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</p> <p>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Isolating from peers and loved ones</p> <p>Concerns about stigma and injustice</p> <p>Avoiding/Cutting school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Encourage continuation of routines</p> <p>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</p> <p>Stay in touch with Friends through telephone, internet, video games</p> <p>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Discuss and address stigma prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak.</p>	<p>Encourage positive activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read, • engage in crafts or hobbies, • go out for a walk or bike ride, • decorate your room, • listen to music, • journal, • draw, • paint, • colour, • connect with friends through social media, • watch a movie or Netflix

Source: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

For more information, please reference the following resource – [“Talking to Children about Covid-19”](#):