

## COVID-19 Resources

Mayo Clinic is using its expertise to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

### COVID-19 Information



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# How to talk to your kids about COVID-19

**You may feel stressed and anxious about COVID-19 — and so may your kids. Try these strategies to talk with them and help them cope.**

By Mayo Clinic Staff

During any rapidly changing situation, loss of daily routine, isolation and uncertainty can lead to anxiety, fear, depression and loneliness. Information overload, rumors and misinformation can make you feel out of control and make it unclear what to do. When you feel this way, your kids may feel it too — and they often sense the way you're feeling. Talking to them about what's going on can be challenging.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has become a source of daily conversation. As a caregiver, you may be wondering how to support your kids' developmental needs and understanding of the coronavirus. Honest and accurate discussion with your kids about COVID-19 can help them understand what's happening, relieve some of their fears, make them feel safe and help them begin to cope.

A good place to start is learning about COVID-19 from reputable sources, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Get the facts about current federal and state recommendations and

how to protect your family from infection. Then you'll be prepared to talk to your kids and provide them with the support they need during a difficult time.

If possible, choose a time when your kids are likely to want to talk, such as at dinner. Ask what they already know and what questions and concerns they have. Everyone reacts differently, but your kids' questions can guide your discussion.

Listen and answer their questions with facts in a way that they can understand. If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest. Let them know that there are a lot of rumors and false information and that you'll help them learn the facts. If it's appropriate for their age, you can show them how to search for the answer on a reliable website.

Frequently talk with your kids to see how they're coping and offer them regular updates as more is learned about COVID-19 and the precautions families should take. Encourage them to express their feelings, letting them know that it's ok to be upset. Also encourage them to come to you with any new questions. This builds trust.

Share simple facts about COVID-19 that are appropriate for your kids' understanding:

- **Define what it is.** COVID-19 is caused by a germ (virus) that can make the body sick. People who have COVID-19 may have a cough, fever and trouble taking deep breaths. But some people, especially kids, who have the virus may not feel sick at all or may have mild symptoms such as those of a cold.
- **Explain how it spreads.** Most commonly, the virus that causes COVID-19 enters people's bodies when it's on their hands and they touch their mouths, noses or eyes. A virus is so tiny that you can't see it. This is why it's important to wash your hands often and try not to touch your mouth, nose or eyes. If someone who has the infection coughs or sneezes on you from a close distance — closer than six feet — then that also can spread the virus.
- **Talk about what's being done.** You're hearing so much about COVID-19 because it's a new illness that has not been seen before. Experts around the world are working hard every day to learn about COVID-19 and how to keep people safe.

Be sure to discuss how your kids can stay safe:

- **Take practical steps.** Encourage frequent and proper hand-washing — especially when coming home, before meals, and after blowing the nose, coughing or sneezing. Show them how to sneeze or cough into a tissue and throw it in the trash or cough into a bent elbow. Clean and disinfect frequently touched items and surfaces around the house.
- **Demonstrate effective hand-washing.** Show your kids how to create tiny soap bubbles by rubbing their hands together and how to get the soap between fingers and all the way to the ends of their fingers, including their thumbs. Encourage your kids to sing the entire "Happy Birthday" song twice (about 20 seconds) so they spend the time they need to get their hands clean.

- **Stay home more.** As school and events are canceled and the family is staying home more, explain to your kids how this can help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Let them know that when the risks of COVID-19 become much lower or go away, they can look forward to being back in their normal routine.
- **Practice social distancing.** Avoid close contact with people outside of home, even if they don't appear to be sick. Pretend there's a bike between you and the person you're standing near, keeping about 6 feet apart from each other. Instead of giving high fives, fist bumps or hugs to people outside your family, give smiles and waves to say hello.
- **Don't forget ways to stay healthy.** Healthy habits include eating a well-balanced diet, getting regular physical activity and getting a good night's sleep.

Here are some steps you can take to help your kids cope:

- **Remain calm.** Your kids will look to you for clues about how to react. Remind them that how they feel right now is OK, and encourage a hopeful outlook for the future.
- **Keep to a routine.** Keep or create new family routines, such as learning activities, meal times, chores, relaxation and bedtimes. This structure helps kids predict what's planned, allowing them to feel control in situations. Use a whiteboard or paper to display a daily schedule at home. Checking off tasks can encourage a sense of accomplishment.
- **Limit access to news.** There may be times of constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media that may heighten fears about the disease. Limit reading, hearing or watching the news. Also limit social media use that may expose your kids to rumors and false information. Be cautious about discussing the news and your fears in front of your kids.
- **Be creative about ways to have fun.** Encourage activities that your kids enjoy, such as puzzles, art projects, reading and music. Create opportunities for family time. Play games with your kids, have them join in on cooking projects and enjoy home movie nights.
- **Enjoy virtual socializing.** Connect with friends and family members using phone calls and FaceTime or similar apps. This can help to avoid feeling isolated and can build and maintain relationships.
- **Avoid placing blame.** Be careful not to blame specific people, including those in a cultural, racial or ethnic group.
- **Seek advice if necessary.** If you notice persistent problems with sleep, changes in eating habits or difficulty concentrating on typical tasks, or if your kids have a persistent sense of hopelessness, excessive sadness or overwhelming worry, contact your doctor or a mental health professional for advice.

When people have COVID-19, or possibly have come in contact with others who have the coronavirus, they are being asked to remain in quarantine — to isolate themselves from others so that they do not spread the infection. This means you should stay in your house and not be in spaces or places with people other than your family.

If your child gets sick, remind him or her that you or another caregiver will keep a close watch at all times. Reassure your child that you will be in close contact with your doctor who can give instructions on care and recovery.

If a family member gets sick and needs to be isolated at home or in the hospital, explain why this person needs to be away from the family at this time. Provide opportunities for your kids to stay in contact with the loved one, whether through electronic devices or the telephone or by sending a note to brighten the day, for example.

Caring for yourself during this time is important. Pay attention to your feelings and rely on loved ones or talk to a mental health professional. Get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and stay active. This will enable you to care for your kids and serve as a role model for how to cope.

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