

Answering Your Young Child's Questions About Coronavirus

Source: Zero to Three

Here are some age-appropriate responses to the common questions a toddler might have about coronavirus.

Even if you've kept your toddler away from news about COVID-19 in the media or overhearing adult conversations, they are bound to have questions. Here are some age-appropriate responses to the common questions a toddler might have. Most importantly, remember to keep your answers simple and age-appropriate.

- *Why can't I play with that little boy over there?* "We have to take a break from playing with others so we can all stay healthy."
- *Why can't I have a turn with that toy?* "We can't play with other children's toys right now, so we can all stay healthy."
- *Why are we wiping down everything with wipes?* "We wipe things down to keep them clean." You don't need to explain more than this—young children don't understand germs or infection transmission yet.
- *Why is that person wearing a mask?* "Sometimes people wear masks when they aren't feeling well. When they are all better, they stop wearing the mask."
- *Is the mask a costume?* "No, sometimes people wear masks when they are sick. The mask just means they are not feeling well."
- *Will I get sick?* "Everybody gets sick sometimes. If you get sick, Mama/Dada will take care of you until you are all better. The doctors will help you, too."
- *Why won't Grandpa (or other loved one) kiss or hug me?* Reassure your child that their loved one still loves and cares about them very much. Then you can explain: "When a grown-up has a cold, they can keep others from getting sick by not hugging or kissing for a while. When they feel better and are healthy again, the first thing they'll do is give you a big kiss!"
- *Why can't I see mommy (or daddy, grandma, etc.)?* If an adult in a child's life needs to be separate from them, children may feel confused about it. Don't worry your young child by talking about sickness or quarantine. You can say, "Mommy needs to be away for a little while, but she will be back soon." Consider ways to stay connected even when physically apart, like video between parent and child.
- *Why can't I go to child care/school?* "Your child care is closed right now. Your teacher and your friends are home too, just like you. When child care is open again, you can go back and see your friends. I'll tell you when." Avoid going into details about illness so toddlers don't develop fears about attending child care.
- *Why can't we leave the house? Why can't my friend come over to play?* "Right now, there is a rule that families need to stay home for a little while and be together. That helps us and our friends stay healthy. I know it can be sad when we can't see and play with friends. But there are lots of fun things we can do together at home! Would you like to play chase or do a puzzle?"

Even if your child is too young to ask these questions, you might notice that they still appear curious about all the changes happening around them. You can validate that something different is happening without going into detail. Explain that a change in routine is happening and what your child can expect instead: "You're going to be staying home with Daddy for a little while, instead of going to child care. This morning we'll go on a walk and then we'll have a snack."

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