

How to Talk to Children About Covid-19

It is important to talk to your children about what is happening, as not knowing can be worse. Children are also likely to ask questions to you during this time. Here are some tips on how to talk to them about what is happening, along with some resources to help you know what to say:

- If they are reluctant to talk, it may be best to try and **have a chat while doing an activity** (particularly if you can do it when side-by-side), like walking the dog, doing the washing up or driving in the car.
- Start by asking them about what they have heard about the virus and the situation. **Ask open** questions (e.g. “What makes you feel that way?”; “What have you heard about the virus?”, “What are your worries about this?”).
- It is important to **listen to their concerns** and **acknowledge them** without minimising them.
- If relevant, you may be able to **correct any misconceptions** that children have about the virus, but don’t say anything if you are unsure about it. Use information from trusted sources.
- **Talk about how they can help themselves** (e.g. washing hands, keeping 2m away from people, cough into tissues/their elbow). Follow government/health guidelines.
- Depending on the age of the child, you may end up having to answer the same questions a number of times. This is also completely normal, **just answer it again**.
- You should try to remember to **keep things positive and give children hope**. For example, tell children that now many people are working to make this better and that even though it is serious, everyone is doing their best to help people. Reassure them that this will pass, you’re there for them, and you will get through this together.
- It can be **helpful to explain to your child that anxiety is a normal human emotion**, and a certain level of it can be helpful. You can talk about how it feels in their bodies, as not all children will know this. For example, notice the signs that they feel anxious (e.g. red face, heart beating faster, speaking faster etc.).
- **Sharing your own worries** may be helpful so that you are being open with them – don’t pretend that things are still the same. Make sure you are also clear about how you manage your feelings and try to remain calm in front of them. Don’t expect these same strategies to work for your children though.
- At the end of the discussion, **remind your children that they can have other difficult conversations with you at any time**. Remind them that you care, you’re listening and that you’re available whenever they’re feeling worried.

These links have advice on how to talk to your children about Covid-19:

- <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus>
- <https://krisepsykologi.no/what-can-we-say-to-children-about-coronavirus/>
- <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

- <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>
- YoungMinds has a page for parents, particularly around if teenagers won't follow social distancing guidelines: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- This link has a useful visual of answers to some particular questions from children: <https://twitter.com/PhoenixLCG/status/1247454169759449089>
- https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf.

Here are some guides for explaining Covid-19 that you can share directly with children:

- <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cco-childrens-guide-to-coronavirus.pdf>
- <https://riseandshine.childrensnational.org/covid-19-faqs-for-kids/>
- For older children, share websites such as the NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

For children who need something more visual, there are social stories to read with them:

- Available in several languages: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>
- <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20UPDATED%20130320%20SD%20OeditsAH.pdf>
- <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Childrens-story-about-coronavirus.pdf>
- <https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>
- <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>
- Illustrated by Axel Scheffler (Gruffalo books): https://issuu.com/nosycrow/docs/coronavirus_ins/1?ff&hideShareButton=true
- <https://www.makaton.org/Assets/Store/FreeResources/CoronavirusInfo.pdf>
- <https://www.scooe.org/news/featured/Documents/Coronavirus%20Social%20Story%20-%20Cheri%20Palladino.pdf>
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/coronavirus-social-situation-t-s-2548770>
- Webpage: <https://paaautism.org/resource/coronavirus-social-story/>
- <https://www.flipsnack.com/KeshetChicago/coronavirus-social-story/full-view.html>
- Comic: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?t=1584464333506>
- Focused on social distancing: http://qrcgcustomers.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/account4876975/6583599_4.pdf and <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/social-contact-story/>

- Focused on staying at home: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59d4c55f268b96ae9afd7ec3/t/5e78cd9330f1866dd97161cc/1584975262405/Be+a+Home+Hero+PDF+%281%29.pdf>
- Handwashing social story: <https://paautism.org/resource/hand-washing-social-story/>
- Children may also struggle with school closure, especially as it is not a holiday or typical break and not something that they have causes. This can impact on their sense of belonging, connectedness and disruption to their learning. Here are some short social stories:
 - <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/School-is-Closed-Social-Story-FREEBIE-Interactive-Color-BW-5333335>
 - <https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2020/03/free-printable-school-is-closed-social-story.html>
 - <https://acesaba.com/blog/school-is-closed-social-story/>

There are also a number of videos:

- Suitable for KS2/3: <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>
- **Cartoon:** <https://twitter.com/BelfastTrust/status/1242116526137843714>
- **Coronavirus: Your questions answered:** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>
- What is being done to tackle the virus: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51204456>
- Coronavirus: What you need to know: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366>
- For older children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOV1aBVYKGA&feature=youtu.be>
- Video explaining why NHS staff are wearing masks: <https://www.facebook.com/campaignformybrain/videos/2663510840640841/>