

Talking with Children About Coronavirus

(Adapted from the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#))

- Be available to talk about the pandemic and answer questions when kids are ready. Kids might not want to think about what is happening and that is okay. If your children approach you with questions or fears, talk openly about their concerns.
- Answer honestly, even if the answer is “I don’t know”.
- Validate kids’ thoughts and fears.
- Keep in mind that children learn how to deal with stress by watching the adults around them.
- Look for accurate information from public health authorities or established news outlets.
- Take a break from the news! Be careful about any frightening images that may appear on the news.
- Talk about all the helpers that are working to care for people and control the pandemic.
- Signs that a child may need additional help from a mental health professional:
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Invasive thoughts or worries
 - Recurring fears
 - Reluctance to leave parents
- If your child has experienced loss or serious illness during the outbreak, they may need additional support
- Here is a comic exploring some common kids’ questions about COVID-19, produced by NPR (also available in Chinese and Spanish):
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>
- Specific answers to questions a young child might ask (including “Why is that person wearing a mask?” and “Will I get sick?”) can be found here: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3265-answering-your-young-child-s-questions-about-coronavirus>

Helping Kids Cope with Social Distancing

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- Children may act out when they are bored or frustrated. Try to prevent this as much as you can by establishing a schedule/routine and trying new activities frequently.
- While a routine is helpful for you and your children, also try to be flexible and patient when your child doesn’t want to participate.
- Talk to kids about their fears.
- Give kids choices when you can and it is safe. Have them choose between two different activities or what they’d like to help make for dinner.
- Encourage kids to learn about something new.
- Keep in touch with family and friends via phone or video chat.
- Talk about and plan activities to do as a family when the pandemic ends.
- When disciplining, use time-outs, redirect bad behavior, praise good behavior and successes, and know when not to respond. Always avoid physical punishment.

- Take care of yourself as a caregiver! Take turns watching children if possible. Walk away for a few minutes if you need a break and children are safe. Get enough sleep and eat well. If you are experiencing your own stress and feel that you need additional help, call your own doctor's office to ask about mental health support.
 - You can contact a trained counselor at SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUs to 66746.

Other Resources

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network provides a nice chart on how to help children cope by age group: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry's COVID-19 Resource Library can be accessed here:

https://www.aacap.org/coronavirus?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Annual%20Meeting

10 Tips to Settle Coronavirus Anxiety for Parents:

<https://www.mindfullivingcounselingservices.com/blog/2020/3/13/coping-with-coronavirus-anxiety>

Positive Parenting During COVID-19:

- From Zero to Three: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>
- From the American Academy of Pediatrics: https://healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Positive-Parenting-and-COVID-19_10-Tips.aspx

Zero to Three Coronavirus Tips for Families: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>