

How can we talk to kids about COVID-19?

Be 'realistically reassuring'



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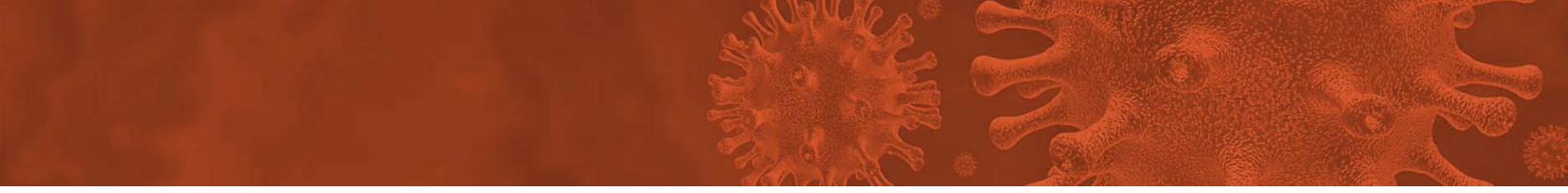
These are scary times, no matter your age or your country. We are all in the battle against the pandemic caused by COVID-19. Each day, we weigh the sometimes confusing advice from political leaders, public health and medical experts, the media, and our own friends and family.

Although we are learning daily more and more about this coronavirus, the illness it causes, and the resources we need to fight it, there is still much we don't know. And that is unsettling.

Our kids' and grandkids' worlds have been turned upside down. Their daily routines are disrupted, family vacations have been cancelled, and their "jobs" (school and preschool) suspended. For many, their parents are now working from home, and it seems everyone is worried about the future. How do we even begin to talk to our children and reassure them?

Here are a few suggestions to help build the resilience that we all need to get through this:

1. **Be reassuring.** As a parent, it is normal to be anxious about the uncertainty that lies ahead, both with regard to our collective health and the economy. These concerns are real. But reassure your children that many doctors, nurses, and scientific experts around the world are working as hard as they can—right now—to keep us all safe and healthy.
2. **Bring children into the conversation.** Kids watch and observe their parents and caretakers: They watch your face, hear your tone of voice, and overhear your conversations. You know your children and their temperaments best. Listen to them and talk with them about the current situation in age-appropriate language. Help them to understand, verbalize and organize their own feelings around the pandemic. Be curious about what they are thinking and feeling.



3. **Help them sort facts from fiction.** Find out what your children know and understand about what is happening. Correct any misinformation about “this new germ.” Be honest, but positive. Reassure them that fewer kids are becoming ill, and when they do, the illness is not as severe. Let them know that the illness is much more of a concern for older people or people who are already sick, which is why everyone needs to take precautions.

4. **Help children have some control.** Children need to feel in control and empowered to protect themselves in whatever way they can. This includes:

- Appropriate, frequent handwashing (show them how and when);
- Sneezing into their elbow, then washing their hands afterward;
- Social distancing (explain what that is, but assure that it is not the same as “emotional distancing”);
- Helping to wipe down and disinfect surfaces. This reinforces their understanding of how this germ is spread through droplets.

5. **Be mindful of media.** Be especially thoughtful about exposure to television and media. Model good media consumption habits. Don’t have a steady stream of TV/news running in the background of your family life. Screen time for kids will no doubt be increased during home quarantines, self-isolation, and “sheltering in place.” This is an opportunity to watch together, to be thoughtful about media choices, and to explore media that are recommended for kids, **including podcasts**.

6. **Be creative and grateful.** There are silver linings to being together as a family in whatever form that is. As you settle in to this “new normal”, you can strengthen existing connections with family, friends, and neighbours. Encourage your collective creativity and foster a sense of optimism and resilience. Talking with kids and showing them how to support and thank people on the frontlines of healthcare and other public services (as well as essential services like grocery stores), is a lesson in civics.

There will be many opportunities to continue the conversation with your children over these next days and weeks. Aim to provide them with realistic reassurance. Times will be tough, but life will go on. It always does.

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