

# Helping children cope with COVID-19

It's all over the news. Everyone is talking about it. So chances are, your kids have heard about the coronavirus, also called COVID-19. But how do you respond to their questions without scaring them? How much do they need to know, and how can you explain things in a way they'll understand? Here's some ideas.

## Above all, be honest.

You don't want to tell your children to ignore COVID-19, or tell them it's no big deal. You may want to protect from the truth, but honesty is best.

You can tell them COVID-19 is a new illness, and it's been making lots of people sick.

Let them know it seems a lot like the flu, and it might lead to a cough, fever, chills and trouble breathing.

Many people who get the virus tend to get a minor case, and children don't seem to get as sick as adults. But for other people, like grandparents and older adults and people with health problems, COVID-19 can make them very sick.

Depending on your child's age, you may share more or less information. Teens are more like adults, while younger children may have a harder time processing information. And of course, while honesty is important, you don't want to give too many details. This can overwhelm children or make them scared. So it helps to stick with the basics.

## Talk about what you can do.

Explain that COVID-19 germs can spread pretty easily, so it's really important to let a grownup know if they feel sick. Getting help early can help prevent others from getting sick. But kids can do a lot to prevent the spread of germs, even before they get sick.

Encourage them to wash their hands a lot, and be sure to wash up after playing with others, after playing outside, and before eating anything. They'll want to wash them for at least 20 seconds. Maybe they can sing the ABCs while they wash their hands to make sure they get the job done.

Encourage them to keep their hands out of their mouths and their fingers out of their noses. Keep lots of hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes around, and remind them to sneeze or cough into their

elbows or tissues to help prevent germs from flying into the air or going onto their hands. Plus, it's just good manners and a good habit to get into.

## **Talk about social distancing.**

A lot of schools are closing right now and parents might be staying home to work. All of this can make children feel confused and scared. Explain that one of the best ways to prevent coronavirus germs from spreading too quickly is to stay at home. When people are around each other, it's easier for the germs to spread from person to person. That means everyone is going to stay home more, and what an adventure that will be.

## **Help your children cope.**

Change is hard on everyone, and children thrive when they have a routine. So when schools close and birthday parties, dance recitals and sports are canceled, it can create anxiety for them and you.

First and foremost, manage your own emotions. Children pick up on your anxiety. If you're alarmed, it can scare them. So take time to deal with your own fear and stress. You don't have to pretend everything is fine, but you want to role model how to cope.

Second, try to create as much of a routine as possible. This can be tricky when you're staying at home, but try to make a regular schedule. Plan for education time, crafts and play time. Eat at regular times and keep a consistent sleep routine. The more predictable life is, the less anxious everyone will feel.

Try to stay busy. Children will probably complain about being bored no matter what you do, but extra activities can help. Make calls to friends and family using online video. Complete puzzles and other crafts, clean out your closets, take a virtual tour of the British Museum in London or New York City's Guggenheim. There are lots of ideas and lists online that you can find activities from.

And finally, talk to your children about their fears. Let them express their feelings. Reassure them. You may feel frantic right now.

There are a lot unknowns and your plate may seem full, but take time to slow down, pause and spend quality time with your children. It will help everyone breathe a little easier.

## **Resources For Living**

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of

health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

©2020 Resources For Living | 44.27.424.1 (3/20)