



How to talk to children about COVID-19

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented changes into our daily routines. Schools, daycares, workplaces, worship communities are among the many places that have been temporarily closed to control this pandemic. Children have also felt the impact of these events by significantly having their structure and routine disrupted. A high-profile event like this requires parents/caregivers to maintain an open and effective communication with their children, aiming to reduce their emotional distress and restore their sense of safety.

These are some basic recommendations to take care of our children's emotional health during times of uncertainty.

1. **Do not be afraid to talk about COVID-19:** At this point, most children are aware of the situation and are constantly receiving new information. As parents/caregivers, we should be open to approach this topic and answer their questions. Avoiding this conversation can increase feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Being receptive and willing to answer their questions can prevent children from believing on speculations and false rumors spread in social media.
2. **Be aware of your child's cognitive and developmental level when sharing information:** Ask your child to share what she/he knows about COVID-19. This is a good strategy to find out their level of awareness and how much information you should share. Do not overwhelm them with information use simple and factual language.
3. **Restore their sense of safety:** This type of events can make children feel unsafe. Talk to them about the safety precautions authorities are taking to protect us. Assure them that you will strive to keep them safe. You can also show them measures that they can implement to keep themselves and others safe (wash their hands, cover their mouths when coughing/sneezing, practice social distancing). Feeling they can do something to contribute can help your child recover some sense of control.
4. **Respect and validate their fears and concerns:** Listen to your child's concerns and doubts. Do not minimize or make fun of their fears, even if they are not realistic. Some children exhibit "magical thinking", which might lead them to have catastrophic ideas. Help them identify these thoughts and share with them some simple, factual information.
5. **Monitor you own emotions:** Parents and caregivers have a great influence in their children's emotions. Choose the right time to have this conversation with your child. If you feel anxious or overwhelmed, perhaps this is not the best time to have this talk. Ground yourself before you bring up the topic.
6. **Limit exposure to news and media coverage:** Parents and caregivers must be informed of the latest events related to COVID-19 however, watching the news constantly exposes your children to information that can be confusing and frightening. Parents should filter the information children have access to. Use alternative ways to stay informed, such as reading the news online to avoid having you TV on permanently.
7. **Limit you child's access to social media if you think this is a source of anxiety for them:** Now that children are at home, they have more time to navigate the internet which exposes them to information that might lead to confusion, anxiety , and misinformation. Be aware of you child's sources of information and use parental controls if necessary.

