



# Coronavirus:

## How to talk to your child about Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus.

- Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks. Parents shouldn't avoid talking about it.
- Not talking about something can actually make children worry *more*. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. Try to help your child feel informed by giving them fact-based information. This is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from other sources.

Be appropriate.

- Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions.
- Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.

Take your cues from your child.

- Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel.
- Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. Be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. Your goal is to [avoid encouraging frightening fantasies](#).

Deal with your own anxiety.

- If you are feeling anxious or panicked. This isn't the time to talk to your children about what's happening with the coronavirus.
- If you notice that [you are feeling anxious](#). Take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions.

Be reassuring.

- Children can be egocentric. Hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough to make them seriously worry that they'll catch it.
- It is helpful to reassure your child about how rare the coronavirus is (the flu is much more common). Reassure them that children actually seem to have milder symptoms.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe.

- An important way to reassure children is to emphasise the safety precautions you are taking.
- Children feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe.
- The coronavirus is transmitted mostly by coughing and touching surfaces.
- The [CDC recommends](#) thoroughly washing your hands as the primary means of staying healthy.
- Remind children that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs). This is important when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.
- If children ask about face masks, explain that the experts at the CDC say they aren't necessary for most people.
- If children see people wearing face masks. Explain that those people are being extra cautious.

Stick to routine.

- Staying grounded in routines and predictability is going to be helpful right now
- This is particularly important if your child's school or child care shuts down.
- Make sure you are taking care of the basics just like you would during school holidays.
- Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping children happy and healthy.

Keep talking.

- Tell children that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more.
- Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open. You can say, 'Even though we don't have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, Mum or Dad will let you know, too'

*Reference:* This information has been sourced from the [Child Mind Institute](#). Attributing Dr Janine Domingues, PHD and Dr Jamie Howard, PHD.

Further Resources

[How to talk to your children about coronavirus](#) – ABC News

[Coronavirus: Keep it simple, stick to facts - how parents should tell kids](#) – BBC News

[How to talk to your kids about the coronavirus \(and ease their fears\)](#) – NBC News

Contacts

For up-to-date information, visit:

- [Tasmanian Public Health website](#)
- [Australian Government Department of Health website](#)
- Coronavirus Health Information Line [1800.020.080](tel:1800020080).