

COVID-19: How to speak to children



As the COVID-19 situation continues to rapidly evolve with increasing measures from federal and provincial governments to curb the spread and risk of infection within our personal communities, many of us are faced with extended school closures and growing inquiries from inquisitive children.

As with many conversations between parents, guardians and children, there requires a balanced approach when speaking of scenarios involving the health and safety of family members, friends and others who play important roles in our lives and development.

Overall, there are two key considerations; to ensure we are providing reliable, age appropriate messages and information and to ensure your children hear and recognize you as their primary source of advice and knowledge.

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

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Here are a few quick tips on how to speak to your children about COVID-19:¹

Find out what your child already knows

Ensure you ask questions at an age appropriate level. For older children, you may ask, “what are your friends saying”, for younger kids, you might ask, “have you heard grownups talking about people being sick”. Asking questions provides you with an opportunity to learn how much information is being consumed and whether the information is fact or fiction based. Follow their lead, they may be interested or not, that’s okay.

Offer comfort and honesty

Help your child feel safe, but maintain honesty. Keep your conversations grounded and concise, offering details to their level of satisfaction. When you don’t have the answer, use the question as a shared learning opportunity using reliable resources including Health Canada or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) websites. Remember to speak calmly and reassuringly.

Listen for opportunities to provide guidance

Pay particular attention to how and where kids are getting information. Reinforce the need to rely upon reliable age appropriate resources and remind them to ask you any questions they may have as often as needed.

Give them a sense of control

Have children complete or manage tasks so they feel they have control. Teach them about the benefits of healthy eating and snacking, adequate sleep and the importance of washing their hands. Explain how each increases their ability to fight infection and strengthens their immune system to fight against viruses. Remember, be a role model when it comes to learning behaviors. Kids may worry about family members and friends, allow them to check-in through calls or video messaging.

Frequent check-ups

Keep up to date and check in with your children frequently. Use COVID-19 as a learning opportunity when possible. Ask questions to learn more about their understanding or lack thereof, and encourage dialogue where possible.

Throughout these exceptional circumstances, we may find ourselves facing moments of inexperience and doubt. Remember, trust yourself and don’t be afraid that you may not have any training on the scenarios surrounding COVID-19.

We’re here to help

Resources:

1. <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>



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