

Children's Wellbeing Service

Information for Parents

How to talk to your children about the Coronavirus

The rumours that children may hear about the virus can be frightening and talking to your child can help them to express their concerns. It is also a good opportunity for them to learn about the importance of hygiene.

Understanding Coronavirus

Up to date information on the signs and symptoms can be found here:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Up to date information on the virus can be found here:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cyz0z8w0ydw/coronavirus-outbreak>

Choosing the right time to talk

It's important that both you and your child feel calm going into the conversation. If you're feeling anxious about coronavirus yourself then it's probably not the best time to have a conversation with them. Choose a safe space and time of day when you can give them your full attention and not when you're tired, stressed, hungry, or rushed. Set a calm, reassuring tone. Let them lead the conversation; anticipate difficult questions but don't prompt these, or overload them with information. Sometimes chatting side by side can work better than face to face. Things can seem bigger and more daunting at night, so offer reassurance if questions arise at this time, and plan to resume the conversation in daylight hours.

Starting the conversation

When children are worried it can be really helpful for them to be able to talk to someone about how they're feeling. We want them to feel that they can come to you with questions or concerns and if you think your child might be worrying about coronavirus, it might be useful for you to bring up the topic with them.

It's really important that you ask your child if they have heard of coronavirus and what they know about it first! This way you can have a clearer idea of some of the rumours your child might have heard and be able to educate them on what's actually true based on factual evidence.

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Exploring their feelings

When a child is worried it is important they have a place that they can express how they're feeling and feel heard. Validate how your child is feeling and empathise with their emotions. Gently offer facts to counter any misconceptions they have (particularly on the level of risk) and explain where your information has come from.

Keeping the conversation realistic

You can emphasise all the hard work the doctors and nurses are doing to keep everyone protected and that experts across the world are working together to find treatments every day.

It might also be important to let your child know that most people who catch coronavirus recover within a few weeks; that children very rarely get sick and when they do it is usually just like a cold; and that pets are not affected. Describe what the main symptoms are and encourage them to let you know if they feel unwell.

In anticipation of disruptions or changes to routine, flag and explain new practices and daily rhythms to reassure. For younger children, this can involve visual cues.

Talking about hygiene

This can be a good opportunity to talk about how we can prevent the virus in the same way we would the flu. You can talk about how important washing our hands is and how this can prevent the virus spreading. You could also use this as an opportunity to teach your child how to wash their hands effectively and when to do so, for example, after bathroom use, before eating and after going to public places. Assign them jobs and roles, and ways they can look after themselves – it will build resilience and give them a sense of control and agency.

Keep the channels of communication open

Remind your child that they can come to talk to you about this topic at a later date if they have any further questions or concerns.