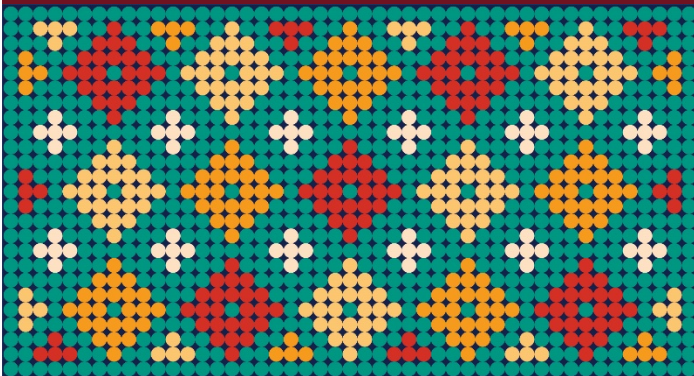


COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus)

Talking with Children About Coronavirus



During this time, children may have questions or concerns about COVID-19. They have probably heard you and others talk about it. This may have brought up anxieties and fear. The best thing to do is to talk with them, make sure they have good information, and make sure they feel like they have a supportive adult to talk to.

Here are some things to keep in mind when talking with them.

What should I tell them about COVID-19?

Tell them coronavirus is a new virus that causes a disease called COVID-19. A virus is a type of germ. Many symptoms are like the flu. Most people who have gotten sick, like children, have had mild cases (fever, runny nose, or cough). People who are older and already have health issues may get sicker.⁶

Reassure them that adults around them—their relatives, doctors, and teachers—are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.^{4,5} Let them know that as Native people, our traditional values of caring for each other and our community will help us make good choices during this time.

How do I talk to a child that I care for?

- Start by asking open-ended questions—broad questions that don't just get a “yes” or “no” answer—to see what they know.¹ For example, “What have you heard about a new sickness that has been going around?” and “How have you been feeling lately?”
- Consider activities like drawing, stories, or singing to help open the discussion.¹
- Give them an opportunity to explore, process, and talk.
- Try not to minimize or avoid their fears or concerns. Listen with an open heart and validate that their feelings are normal.^{1,2}
- Remain calm; children can pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues like body language during conversations.^{3,4}
- Keep information age-appropriate while ensuring that it is still honest and accurate.^{3,4}
- Watch their body language for signs of anxiety like tone of voice, movement, breathing pace.^{1,5} Other signs of anxiety can be crankiness, clinginess, trouble sleeping, and distraction.⁵
- Wrap up conversations in a good way.¹ For example, say a prayer, smudge, sing, do an activity of their choice.
- Let your child know that they can come to you with any questions.^{3,4}

What should I tell them about how they can help?

Tell them there are things they can do to help.⁵ Tell them that the following actions can help protect them, their relatives, and their friends.

- Wash hands often: Wash with soap and water for 20 seconds (sing the ABCs).³ Make sure to get between the fingers, under the nails, and up the wrists. Wash after using the bathroom and being in public places like the playground or bus. This is the most important way to help!
- Sneeze and cough into the elbow or a tissue. Scientists believe that coronavirus spreads through droplets when a sick person sneezes and coughs. Covering coughs and sneezes prevents these droplets from going in the air and/or onto your hands.
- Avoid touching the face, including nose picking, rubbing the mouth, and rubbing the eyes
- Play dates with friends will have to wait for now. Friends and relatives are still there for support. Connect with loved ones through social media, phone, or letters.
- Skip having friends over for birthdays or other important events. Have a video chat party or a phone call instead.
- Keep an adult informed of any symptoms like fever, cough, or trouble breathing.^{1,4}

How should I explain why they can't see their friends right now?

Let them know that the virus is mainly spread from person-to-person, so staying away from others will make it harder for the virus to spread.⁴ This will help keep their loved ones and other people from getting sick. Make sure to tell them that this is temporary.⁴ Let them know that their friends are all trying to keep their distance too. When things get better, they will get to see their friends again. Give them the option to write notes or send messages to their friends and teachers about how they are feeling.

How can I help my child cope?

- Maintain a normal routine as much as possible.⁴
 - Have consistent times for snacks, play, physical activity, and bed.
- Create opportunities to play and relax when possible.¹
- Pay attention to what your child sees in the media, i.e. try to keep them away from scary images on social media or TV, let them know that they can talk to you about anything they see,^{1,5} talk about what they are hearing and correct any misinformation,⁵ and reduce screen time on COVID-19 may ease anxiety.¹
- Share stories of kindness—like doctors and nurses, scientists, elders, and young people helping their community stay healthy.³ These actions can remind children of the goodness of people and help them feel safer.
- Tell them family stories or read a book on the strength and resilience of our ancestors who lived through hard things like this. Here are a few good books you could read.
 - Crazy Horse by Joseph Bruchac
 - Jingle Dancer by Cynthia Leitich Smith
 - SkySisters by Jan Bourdeau Waboose
- Make sure to take good care of yourself.¹ Take time to breathe and be gentle with yourself. You are trying your best. In order to take care of others, we have to take care of ourselves.

How can I ensure they don't spread stigma or false information?

Tell them that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, where they are from, or their language.⁶ Remember that children often copy behaviors around them so try to set a good example, like supporting or showing concern for others.⁵ Avoid blaming others or making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.^{1,3,4} Finally, remind them that if they hear bullying, they should tell a trusted adult.¹

References

1. United Nations News. (2020, March 17). Talking to your children about coronavirus: Let them know you're listening, remind them you care. news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059622
2. UNICEF. (2020, March 16). How to talk to your children about coronavirus (COVID-19). www.unicef.org.au/blog/news-and-insights/march-2020/how-to-talk-to-your-children-about-coronavirus
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 19). Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children. www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html
4. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2020, March 1). Parent/caregiver guide to helping families cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019. www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
5. Healthy Children. (2020, March 22). 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx
6. Gharib, M. (2020, February 28). Just for kids: A comic exploring the new coronavirus. National Public Radio. www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus