

TALKING TO YOUNG CHILDREN About Coronavirus

WHAT TO TELL AND DO WITH YOUR TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS?

This is a time of uncertainty, which may be compounded by the Governor's order to close public schools and non-essential businesses. Suddenly, you and your children's routines are upended. They are not going to preschool or child care to be with their teachers and friends. They cannot have playdates. You may be laid-off. Or you may be home all the time, trying to work, while your children want to play or do an activity together. All of this creates even more stress. Plus you are wondering what to do about things that were simple only a short time ago. Should I go to the grocery store? How can I keep myself and my children safe from contamination?

You have questions about all of this and it is natural for your children to ask questions too. This guide may help you to talk to your children about the coronavirus, that causes the COVID-19 disease, and help to answer some of your children's questions about COVID-19. It also suggests activities to keep your children busy and use their media in a positive way.



INITIATE THE CONVERSATION ABOUT CORONAVIRUS/ COVID-19 WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Your children have probably heard the words "Coronavirus" and asked you what it is. Children are looking to you for reassurance, so you can tell them that it is a kind of germ that can make people feel sick. Remind them of a time they were sick and how after a while they felt better. Social stories are useful to help explain some changes in routine. These are individualized short stories that depict a social situation your child might be affected by. These can be created together with your child, and/or you might find some social stories that are already posted on the internet to be useful for breaking it down into simple terms. You can read the stories together, or watch them on YouTube or make your own. Even after you watch and talk about the virus, your children may ask you the same questions, again. They want that reassurance, so don't become frustrated. Model patience. Don't get frustrated and be prepared to watch the videos and answer their questions repeatedly.

- Scripted Story: [Why is My School Closed?](#)
- Recorded Story: [Let's Talk About the Coronavirus.](#)
- Recorded Story: [Why Can't I Go to School?](#)
- Recorded Story (Spanish): [Why Can't I go to School?](#)

ANSWER WHEN CHILDREN ASK OR RAISE QUESTIONS

Children are always listening and watching you and the world around them. They are hearing words they do not understand. Their schedules have changed. They have questions such as: Why can't I go to school? Why can't I play with my friend? Why are you not at work? Why are you wearing gloves/mask?

Find answers to some of the questions your child may ask at:

- [Zero to Three - Answering your Young Child's Questions About Coronavirus](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA: Tips for Caregivers, Parents and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)

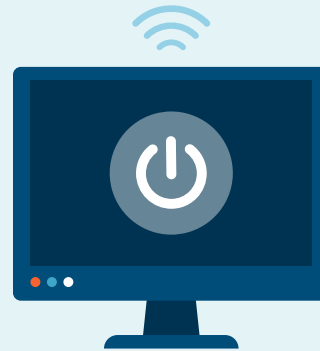


CREATE ROUTINES

Children rely on adults to create patterns and routines that seem predictable. This is not to suggest a rigid schedule, or a heavy emphasis on mastering specific tasks. But creating patterns can be helpful. For example, every morning after breakfast, children could be invited to wiggle and dance to a song. Every morning, children could do a craft, using items that might normally be recycled or discarded such as egg cartons, plastic caps and lids, unmatched socks, etc. It does not have to be expensive or complicated to satisfy a child. In the afternoon, children could have an opportunity to play outside or run around

inside. Children could bounce on couch cushions laid on the ground, or run from one point on a sidewalk to another. Storytime could be in the afternoon before a nap, or after a nap, or at night. Or you could have afternoon and evening storytime. Play is a child's work, so giving children the opportunity to play is really best, along with snuggles and reassurance that their world is still a predictable place. Try to find ways to keep to normal routines, like mealtimes, napping, and bedtime. Remind them that you are making sure that they are safe and that you are safe.

- [Find Some Easy Activity Ideas in a Family Staycation Kit.](#)
- [Find an At-Home Activity Guide From Zero To Three.](#)



MONITOR SCREEN TIME

Facetime, Skype, What's App, and other video chat platforms can be useful for staying connected with family. Even young children might like to visit with relatives and friends for short 5-10 minute chats.

[Find a resource with suggestions on making the most of video conference times.](#)

Overall use of screen time should be monitored. Children's brains are still developing and it is important to keep in mind that they are better off learning to alleviate boredom through non-electronic activities. Even without an emergency, young children should have limited exposure to screens—computers, phone screens and televisions. This may be more difficult when everyone is home and children are not in a child care setting that keeps them playing and learning with other children.

Exposure to news media regarding Coronavirus should be avoided. Children pick up information quickly but may not be able to make sense of what it means for them. They hear the television, your phone calls and Skype, and watch you as you react to information. Try to watch the news or talk to people about the news when your children are not with you. Monitor what they are seeing on a phone or screen. Remind them that they should come to you with any questions.

[Find Some Advice From Common Sense Media.](#)

RESPOND TO CHANGING BEHAVIORS

Your child may be too young to talk, but your child understands your expressions. When there are new stresses, young children's behavior may change in reaction to the changing circumstances. Very young children will not be able to express how they feel in words but may have behaviors that show that they are dealing with stress. For example, they may have trouble falling asleep and will wake up more at night. They may cling to you or want to be with you more. They may have tantrums or whine. Some children will regress on toilet training, want the comfort of a bottle instead of a cup, be a pickier eater, or talk less or more.



Respond by allowing some space for these behaviors and by providing reassurance. Encourage children to act out their feelings through play, reenactment and storytelling. Parents and family members are under stress too. Find ways to take a moment to calm yourself before responding to a child's behavior.

Find some ways to keep routines and handle changing behaviors at:

- [Usable Knowledge - Caring for Your Preschoolers at Home](#)
- [UNICEF - Covid-19 Parenting One-On-One Time](#)

EXPLAIN WHEN SOMEONE IN YOUR HOME IS SICK

If someone at your home is sick—whether with COVID-19 or something else—that person may be self-quarantined. That person is probably not having meals with the rest of the family, is not watching television or able to play or take walks with the child.

Be careful not to blame people for getting sick. People get colds, the flu and other serious illnesses and it is not their fault. Reassure your child that not everyone is going to get sick, that when people get sick they get better, and that handwashing is one of the best ways that we can stay healthy.