

# TALKING TO YOUR TEENS About Coronavirus



Most teens are aware of Coronavirus (COVID-19) from social media, news, family and friends. They are likely old enough to understand how it is spread and ways to prevent it. They also face new routines that include remote schooling, distance from friends and other stressors. As a parent, you want to make sure that they receive reliable information.

## STAY CALM AND GET INFORMED

- Your children will follow your lead about how to react and how anxious they should be.
- Get credible information about the virus so that you can have open and honest conversations with your teens and correct any information they've heard that may not be true ("It's no worse than the flu").
- Take care of yourself as a parent. Get plenty of sleep and do things that help you feel calmer—talk with friends and family, exercise, listen to music, etc.

## FIND OUT WHAT YOUR TEEN KNOWS, LISTEN AND BE AVAILABLE

- Create an open environment where teens can talk to you about the virus and their feelings, but follow their lead. Some teens may not want to talk about it and that is okay.
- Start by asking what they have heard about Coronavirus. This gives you a chance to understand how much they know and whether their information is accurate. Offer to answer any questions.
- Be sure to listen. Acknowledge their feelings and concerns with "I know this feels scary" or "I understand that it's frustrating to have to stay home."



## BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

- Older children will have more access to information through the internet, social media, and their friends. Some of this information may create more anxiety. Some of this information may not be correct.
- Be honest if your child asks if you are worried. They will know if you are not telling them the truth. You can say things like: "Yes, I'm worried about the virus, but I know that there are ways to prevent its spread and take care of the family if one of us gets sick."
- Some teens may not feel worried about getting sick. They may be more worried about having to stay home, and what they may be missing out on. Acknowledge these feelings. Gently explain that they have a responsibility to keep other people in their community healthy, and the best way to do that is by staying home.
- Teach your child how to find accurate and up-to-date information from the CDC, WHO, or more other teen-specific resources (examples: [UNICEF: How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) and [Teen Vogue: Coronavirus and COVID-19: What They Are, What's the Difference, and How You Can Respond](#))
- One of the most important things you can do is teach your teenager how to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. Remind them that there are things they can do to help keep themselves and their family healthy:

- Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds with soap and water.
- Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are unavailable.
- Avoid touching your face or eyes unless you've washed your hands.
- Stay home.
- When outside, keep a distance of at least 6 feet from other people. To help, imagine there is a full-size couch between you!
- If you sneeze or cough, use a tissue and throw it away immediately and wash hands. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your elbow then wash hands.
- Get enough sleep, eat healthy food, exercise and connect with friends and family by phone and video.
- Don't blame others. Don't make assumptions. Viruses can make anyone sick no matter where they come from or what they look like.



## KEEP UP YOUR ROUTINE

- Keep a normal routine as much as possible, but be flexible. Try and keep a similar sleep and meal schedule.
- Your child's school has probably set up lesson plans and resources for you to use at home. For younger teens, try to set aside the same time each day for schoolwork. Give plenty of breaks.
- Encourage your teen to get some fresh air and exercise, while keeping a distance from others. This is important for their mental health and wellbeing.
- Teens can also take on some responsibility in the house. They can shop for supplies online, watch and play with younger siblings and prepare meals.



## MONITOR MEDIA USE

- Have conversations with your teen about monitoring their screen time. Teens may need time on social media to connect with friends, and this can be helpful to them when they're feeling isolated at home. Help them monitor the time they spend on video games or Youtube videos. Many libraries are offering free access to books online.
- Talk with teens about how many stories about the virus on the internet might be based on rumors and inaccurate information. It's important to help them think through the information that they come across.
- Avoid spending too much time following information about the virus—this can increase your anxiety and theirs.

