

Be Well Tips

Talking to Your Child about Coronavirus

The fast-moving developments and intensive news coverage in relation to coronavirus can be challenging for parents. As we all focus on precautionary measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, there are also some simple steps we can take to protect the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people. The following tips for parents compiled by our Cognita Education and Wellbeing Team are designed to help when discussing the issue with your child.

- **Do not avoid talking about coronavirus or pretend it is not happening.**
Even young children will have heard about it in the playground and avoiding the issue can cause unnecessary anxiety. Support and reinforce the guidance and advice that your child's school has issued.
- **Be your child's trusted news source.**
Be the person who filters the content to ensure they get informed, factual information, appropriate to their age.
- **Be reassuring.**
It's helpful for children to hear that the common flu is more common than coronavirus, that children are less susceptible to it and that washing hands is a very effective way of slowing down its spread.
- **Listen to what they are worried about and validate those feelings.**
Don't dismiss their worries, even if they are unrealistic, but guide them to the facts and things they can do to help themselves stay safe.
- **Be aware that their concern might be about their grandparents or elderly relatives.**
Of course, this group of people is factually at greater risk of the virus, and so it is best to acknowledge this worry. However, reassure them that their relatives are doing all the things being advised in order to stay safe and healthy, and therefore it is unlikely that they will become ill.

- **Talk to your child in a manner that is appropriate to their developmental age and to their level of interest or concern.**

Try not to overwhelm them with information and false promises. Instead give them the basics and take your lead from their questions.

- **Manage your own anxiety.**

If you are worried yourself, your child will probably pick up on this. When talking to them about it, try to stick to the facts rather than the concerns you might have. Be mindful of what you say and do in front of your children – if you are stockpiling goods, this might undermine the reassuring messages you are trying to give them.

- **Empower them by teaching them about the things they can do to stay safe.**

Reinforce, for example, the importance of washing their hands regularly for 20 seconds (the length of time to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice).

- **Try to maintain a sense of childhood normality for them.**

Children are easily absorbed into things they enjoy. There is no reason for them to stop doing these things, which will offer a healthy distraction from their worries.

- **Concentrate on the here and now.**

Accept that it’s ok to say ‘I don’t know’. ‘What if’ questions about the future are not helpful – not just because we do not yet know the answers, but because, for younger children especially, the future is an abstract concept.

- **Guide your older child to reputable sources of information.**

If your adolescent is on social media, emphasise the importance of listening to trustworthy news outlets and not getting caught up in sensational stories which are rarely based on expert evidence.

- **Filter the amount of news coverage your child sees to help reduce any anxiety they may have about it.**

For example, turn off the radio in the car or in the house and talk about other issues.

- **Help your older child manage exam stress.**

Older children may naturally be concerned about exams and the impact on their studies. Stick only to the facts and reassure them that any action to close schools or delay exams would likely impact everyone equally. They should continue to work as guided by their school – one day at a time.

Above all, keep talking to them

Tell your child that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more but for now, they should get on with day-to-day living, with your support.

This BBC article offers more child-friendly advice on discussing coronavirus with children, as does **this post by the Child Mind Institute**.

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