

Talking to children about the new coronavirus

Introduction Your child may be worried by what they have seen or heard in the news about coronavirus. They may ask questions and look to you for clues about how to react. Although you may feel you do not have all the answers, it is important to take time to listen and to talk with them about their concerns. The way you approach this will be different according to the age of your child. Below are some possible questions your child might have, tips on how to answer these, and visual prompts to support the understanding of younger children or those with additional needs.

Information for parents:

Explaining how every family is affected in some way

Children may believe that the overwhelming amount of coverage and talk about coronavirus means that they are certain to get the virus, or that those they love will definitely catch it. You can help your child by emphasising that:

- The virus has meant big changes to all our lives, and everyone is talking about but this doesn't mean everyone will catch it
- Although we are all affected, and we can't see the virus, there are lots of things we can do to reduce our chances of catching the virus

The Science

Give your child the very basics to help them understand. You can help your child by:

- Using clear and accurate language
- Giving just the amount of information needed to answer your child's question

Explaining Government restrictions

Lockdown means disrupted routines and missing out on social contact with special people. This can be upsetting for many children, especially if they don't understand why it is necessary. You can help your child by:

- Emphasizing that by not visiting older relatives we are helping to keep them and others like them safe
- Sharing ideas about other ways to keep in touch with special people (e.g. drawing a picture and posting it; emailing; sending a letter; using video chat apps)
- Scheduling a regular time to make contact with grandparents and vulnerable relatives
- Emphasising that these restrictions will not last forever, and that the more we can stick to them, the sooner things will be able to get back to normal


Grief and loss

Like adults, children will react in different ways to the experience of grief and loss. Let them know you are available to listen if they want to talk (but that it's ok if they don't). You or your child may also wish to seek the support of external agencies (see information from 'Cruse' below)

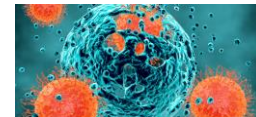
A suggested text for children:

Why is everyone talking about coronavirus?

Adults are all talking about coronavirus because everyone is affected by it in some way. It's new so we don't yet know everything about it. Here are some things we do know:

- It's a tiny germ (something that lives in our bodies) that we can't see with our eyes because it's so small. It looks like  a ball with spikes.
- Adults are worried that it makes some people sick and there is no medicine to stop us getting ill from it yet
- It's contagious or 'catching' meaning people can pass it to each other when they are close enough, without knowing

How does it make us unwell?



- It sticks to other tiny bits inside our airways, called cells which normally help us to stay healthy. When the coronavirus sticks to them they can't work properly. It makes loads of copies of itself and spreads round inside our chest attacking the cells in our airways making us cough
- Our own cells in our body try to fight coronavirus off which makes us feel hot and unwell. We might feel like this for a few days whilst our own 'army' tries to get rid of the coronavirus germs.

Why can't we go out or see grandparents?



- The coronavirus germ gets into our body from another person's hands and from drops of water when someone coughs. We need to stay in our homes so that we can't pass it to anyone or catch it from someone
- People over 70 can become very ill if they get it so we have to stay away and they have to stay indoors

Someone I know has died. Why?

- Some people already have an illness which means their body can't fight off coronavirus as well as other people. Very sadly, some people are dying because their bodies can't fight it off.

General tips: Try to stay calm and reassuring; be guided by your child; aim for 'just enough' information; be honest and accurate; use clear language that is appropriate for the age of your child; give practical tips for how children can reduce their risk of catching the virus; balance discussions focused on coronavirus with talking about more positive topics

Staying safe and supporting each other

As well as talking about the dangers of coronavirus, it is important to let children know that there are things they can do to protect themselves and others. This can be helpful in giving children a sense of control, at a time when it might feel that there is so much that is out of their control. You can help your child by:

- Ensuring they know the steps they can take to protect themselves and others
- Emphasising that by sticking to the guidelines they are helping to make a big difference to the number of people who will get coronavirus
- Encouraging children to take daily exercise or spend time outdoors wherever possible

Children often want to know what comes next

Although, as adults, we know that the current changes to our daily lives are temporary, children (especially younger children or those with additional needs) may assume they are permanent. You can help your child by:

- Making it clear that the current situation will not last forever
- Emphasising that scientists are developing a vaccine and that politicians are making plans to help things get back to normal as quickly as possible, whilst keeping us safe

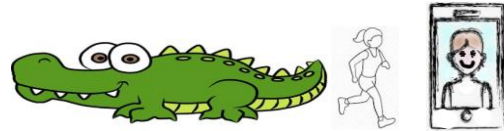
Explaining change

Change can be difficult to cope with, whatever our age. It can be especially hard when timescales for a 'return to normal' are shifting or unclear. Some children may be worried about going back to school. You can help your child by:

- Taking one day at a time
- Trying to encourage them to focus on the 'here and now'

We know we have to wash our hands...What else should we do to help?

- Adults can take food to people over 70 and anyone who has another illness which might mean if they catch coronavirus they can't fight it off. This way people who might become very ill with coronavirus don't need to go out for shopping and be near others.
- We all need to keep a crocodile-length away from anyone who doesn't live with us so it doesn't pass on



- We can all keep in touch by calling and videoing.
- We can stay at home unless we are going for a walk, run or other exercise so that we aren't near others
- Some adults are key workers so they are helping by going to work in important jobs, like nursing, whilst being very careful.



When will it go away?

We don't know but scientists are working on a medicine to fight it off or stop us catching it. We think you can't catch it again once you've had it so some people may not need the medicine as they may have caught the virus already and not known because they felt fine.



Will things ever be the same as before?

Most things will go back to normal but it will take time. Eventually most people will go back to work and school and we can see our friends again.



helpline@cruse.org.uk

0808 808 1677

Educational Psychology Service
Schools ICT
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The Educational Psychology Service can help with additional information, references and suggestions. Please contact our service or speak to your school SENCo.



Need support?

Our COVID 19 community response line is now open offering vital help to people who need food or essential items

01204 337221

8.30am – 5.30pm Mon – Fri and Sat 9am – 1.30pm



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