

COVID CONVERSATIONS

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT COVID-19



INTRODUCTION

In order to start a conversation about COVID-19, it is important to understand what the disease is, how it spreads, where it came from, and where to find the most up to date information. It is important to know your facts and prepare for all types of conversations. If you don't know the answer to your child or student's question, that is okay. It is important to acknowledge the question, tell them you do not know the answer, find the answer, and then get back to them. Do not guess or make up an answer – that will confuse them and may lead to misinformation.

This guide will first include information about COVID-19 and then include information about talking to your children and/or students about COVID-19.

KEY POINTS

1. KNOW THE FACTS!

Make sure you are up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 information.

2. USE RELIABLE INFORMATION.

Get your information from reliable sources like the CDC.

3. PROTECT YOURSELF.

Know how to protect yourself from COVID-19.

GENERAL COVID-19 INFORMATION

WHAT IS COVID-19?¹

COVID-19 is the short name for “coronavirus disease 2019” and it is a new virus. There are many types of human coronaviruses including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. The disease is called coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the virus is called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Viruses and the diseases they cause often have different names because there are different processes and purposes for naming the two.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?²

COVID-19 is primarily spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets by coughing, sneezing, and/or talking. You may also be able to get it by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?³

There are many symptoms of COVID-19, here are some of the common ones:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Congestion or runny nose



If you or a student are experiencing any of the following emergency warning signs for COVID-19, seek emergency medical care immediately:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT THE SPREAD? ⁴

There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19. You can do that by:

- Staying at home when possible. Only leave your house to make essential trips like going to work, getting groceries, and picking up medications.
- Wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth in public settings.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Follow any prevention measures put in place by the school.

TALKING ABOUT COVID-19

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW BEFORE I START THE CONVERSATION? ⁵

Children may be worrying about many things during these times. As a trusted adult in their lives, you can play an important role in helping children understand what is going in the world. It is important to help them make sense of what they hear and see in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear.

Before you start, assess how you are feeling since that will set the tone for the conversation. If you are not ready to have the conversation, take some time to prepare and evaluate your feelings.

It is also important to remember that children have been impacted differently by this pandemic. There are some children whose loved ones have been infected, others may have parents who are essential workers, and some might have lost loved ones. It is important to be prepared to have a variety of conversations. If you need more support, please reach out to your school's support staff.



HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU START THE CONVERSATION:⁶

- Identify how you are feeling. This will set the tone for the conversation and will influence children’s reactions.
- Ask children what they know about COVID-19. If they don’t know anything about it or they have inaccurate information, share resources and facts with them.
- Ask children about their feelings and acknowledge the wide range of emotions they might be feeling.
 - “I can tell that you are feeling scared. Everyone is talking about the illness because it is new, which can be scary and overwhelming.” (*Provide facts and reassurance*)
 - “Usually, COVID-19 in children is mild.”
 - “We are here to support you.”
 - “We are doing everything we can do to make sure we are all safe.”
- Reinforce what your children can control.
 - “Wash your hand frequently.”
 - “Make sure you cover your coughs and sneezes.”
 - “Wearing a mask is important to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”
 - “I am here to answer any questions or concerns you have.”

TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT COVID-19⁷

- **Remain calm.** Children will react to what you say and how you say it. Reassure children that they are safe. Talk to them about what is happening in a way that they can understand.
- **Keep it simple.** Make yourself available to listen and talk. Let children know that even though schools look different this year you are still available to talk.
- **Avoid language that might blame others or lead to stigma.** COVID-19 does not discriminate and there is no person or group of people that are more likely than others to spread COVID-19. It is important to correct any negative language that can cause stigma in the conversations you are having.
- **Pay attention to what children see or hear on TV, radio, and online.** Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information can lead to anxiety. It is also important to consider where they are getting their information from, teaching children about misinformation and how to identify credible news sources.
- **Provide information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.** Talk to children about how some of the stories about COVID-19 on social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information. Ask children to talk about the stories they have heard and help them make sense of what is true or inaccurate.
- **Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.** Remind children to wash their hands frequently and cover their coughs and sneezes. If school is open, discuss actions being taken to protect students and staff.



KEY POINTS

1. BE TRUTHFUL.

Take time to find the correct answers and do not spread misinformation.

2. STAY CALM.

Your tone will influence the conversation and shape your student's attitude/opinion.

3. KEEP IT SIMPLE.

Talk to students at their level and use examples they can relate to.

MORE RESOURCES

1. Helping Children Cope During and After a Disaster:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/pdf/children-coping-factsheet-508.pdf>

2. Trauma Informed Schools During COVID-19:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/trauma_informed_school_strategies_during_covid-19.pdf

3. CDC Resources in Languages Other than English:

<https://www.cdc.gov/pubs/other-languages?Sort=Lang%3A%3Aasc>

SOURCES

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