

COVID-19 for KIDS:

Conversation Tips About COVID-19 for Each Grade Level

presented by the National Association of School Psychologists

Children look to adults for guidance about how to react to stress. The COVID-19 crisis will be less upsetting to kids when parents model calm problem solving, flexibility, and compassion.

When you're talking to your children about COVID-19, let them lead the discussion. Answer their questions honestly, using age appropriate terms and explanations. Remember, if they ask you something, it means they've been thinking about it. Validate their thoughts.

With younger kids, use open-ended questions, ask what they've heard or know. If you are co-parenting, be sure your messaging is consistent.

Monitor your child's mental health just as you'd monitor their physical health.

Be aware of behavioral or emotional changes lasting more than 2 weeks as intervention may be appropriate. Also be on the lookout for anxiety when you are preparing to go to work, and/or returning home. Address children's concerns and behaviors in real time whenever possible. Provide support, and create a safe space for them to verbalize feelings—AND for you to listen.



- Provide brief, simple, factual information
- Reassure them: "Adults are working hard to keep you safe."
- Explain social distancing, aka "Why can't I play with my friends?"
- Explain ways to stop germs and stay healthy: Eat nutritious foods, get plenty of sleep, wash your hands!



- Listen—they are likely more vocal about their safety.
- Separate rumors from facts.
- Discuss local, state, and national strategies to keep the virus from spreading.
- Explain the importance of social distancing, aka "What is flattening the curve?"



- Take time for more in depth conversations.
- Engage them in family decision making: A family calendar helps establish a routine and increases their sense of control (when to study, exercise, face time family members at work, do chores).
- Emphasize their responsibility to socially distance, aka "NOT just older people get the virus."
- Help them find a safe way to help others in their community.

Emotional Red Flags

Preschoolers: Regressive behavior, (thumb sucking, bedwetting, fear of dark) clinging to parents, sleep and appetite disturbances
Elementary Schoolers: Irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, social withdrawal
Adolescents: Sleeping/eating disturbances, agitation, physical complaints, increase in conflicts with parents