



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT **CORONAVIRUS**





The world is facing a daunting pandemic – a virus that has transcended borders and had a huge impact on all of our daily lives.

We know for children this kind of event can fuel sadness and stress and so it's critical in a time like this to ensure they feel protected and comforted. Together with psychologist Karen Young, we've produced a helpful guide designed to help parents and carers navigate some of the difficult conversations and situations that may come up during this pandemic.

1 Let them know that whatever they are feeling is okay

Children might respond in many different ways to news of a crisis. Let them know they aren't alone, and that whatever they are experiencing or feeling in response to a crisis is normal, *"There are so many people who feel exactly the way you do. You aren't alone – I promise."*

Validate their feelings, but do this from a position of strength: *"I can hear how worried you are. Everything you are saying makes so much sense. What's happening is scary, but you are safe."*

Whatever you are feeling is okay too. It can be a source of strength for your children if they can see that even when you are anxious, you can feel strong, or even when you are uncertain about a lot of things, you can feel certain that they are safe: *"Sometimes I feel worried because it is so unfamiliar, and I know that whatever happens, we will get through this."*

2 Reassure your children

The questions children ask will often be driven by a need for reassurance that they are safe, so let this guide your answers. It's important they feel comfortable to raise their fears or any questions they might have. Encourage them to speak freely about things that are concerning them. Answer their questions honestly and with as much information as they need to feel safe.

Let your children know that there are many people working hard to keep them safe – scientists, doctors, nurses and emergency responders – and that people are working on developing a vaccine. If they see emergency services in action or hear sirens, reassure them that the people involved in these services are skilled at what they do, and try to focus on the positives.

3 Help your children know they, and others, won't be alone

Crises are a time when communities come together. Families, neighbours, emergency workers and government authorities all have skills and resources to contribute – your children should know that they won't be alone if a disaster strikes.

Talk to them about the charities and organisations that are providing resources and support. Remind them of the good in the world, and whenever you can, share the good news stories about the things people are doing to help each other.

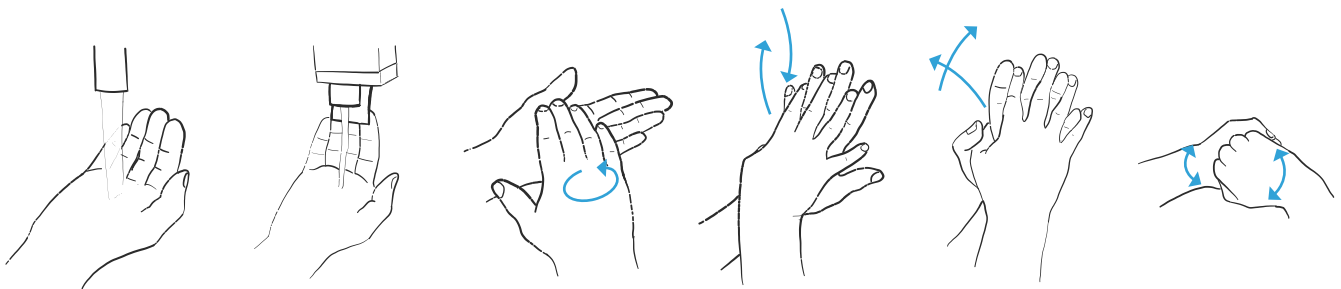
4 What if this happens to us?

Traumatic events can make children very aware of their own vulnerability and a crisis can understandably trigger fears that something could happen to them. Children will look to the important adults in their lives for signs of safety. When those adults believe they are safe enough,

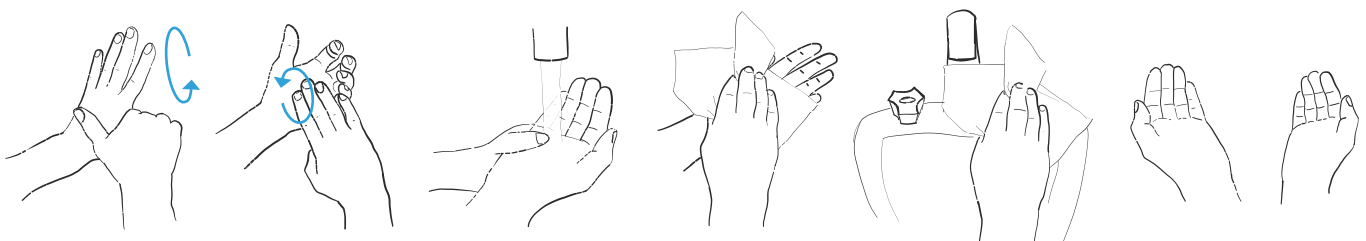
it will be easier for children to believe it too: *“Every time something like this happens, we learn how to stay safer. We learn how things like this happen, so we can stop it happening again. There are people who are working hard to make sure we are safe, and I trust them.”*

5 Ensure your children understand how to protect themselves from coronavirus

Talk to your children about the importance of sanitation and how to prevent a coronavirus infection. To ensure kids are washing their hands with soap and water for long enough (at least 20 seconds), come up with a fun song to sing while they do so (the Happy Birthday or alphabet songs are good examples) and tell them to count to 10 after using hand sanitiser to ensure it has dried. Make sure that children know to cough or sneeze into their elbows and to always wash their hands after doing so.



Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you,



Happy Birthday dear friend, Happy Birthday to you!



6 Talk to your child about the facts

When you're explaining the virus to your child, be sure to use language they'll understand or perhaps create a visual example which will give them a clearer idea of what it is. We can describe how viruses need us to help them move into our lungs and infect us, so the easiest way to avoid that is to not touch it, not touch our faces and keep our hands very clean. If they ask, help them understand the symptoms – shortness of breath, fever, tiredness and a cough – and that so far, it has not affected many children at all.

Children might focus on the similarities between themselves and the people who have become sick, which will add to their anxiety. To help them feel safe, it is important to steer them towards the differences. These might include their age, their health, or that they live in a country with a strong health system. An important difference is that every day that goes by, we learn more about the virus, and about how to stay safe.

7 Help them find ways to help

Ask your children what they can do to help others in your community. Encouraging them towards their own acts of kindness will help to replace feelings of helplessness with a sense of hope and the awareness they can make a difference.

Even by washing their hands, covering their coughs, or keeping their distance in public, they are doing something really important – they are helping to protect the people who are more vulnerable from becoming really sick. Perhaps they could write letters to elderly or more vulnerable neighbours, or schedule regular video calls with grandparents.

8 Maintain a sense of fun, spontaneity and joy in their daily lives

Now that schools are closed for many children and self-isolation measures are being enforced, it's easy for children to feel restless.

This is the perfect time to ask them what they would like to do and come up with some ideas together. Perhaps you can start a herb garden on your balcony and practice using them to cook together, draw or paint some landscape pictures outside, or create a time capsule of items and bury it in your garden.

If you are staying indoors, have a conversation with your child about creating a daily challenge or game so you have something to look forward to each day. Older children may enjoy keeping a journal of this time.

9 But it's also important to keep a routine

In times of uncertainty, children will benefit from keeping to their normal routine or schedule. As much as you can, keep the conversation at dinnertime as normal as possible. At bedtime, why not ask your child to talk about their day and name three things they feel they did well or enjoyed.

Having a sense of purpose and routine can help both adults and children avoid feelings of stress and anxiety and making sure we feel productive, fulfilled, confident and in control.



RESOURCES

Education

- [BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Khan Academy](#)
- Education Otherwise - [Online education resource list](#)
- Times Education Supplement have made [some resources](#) free
- [Amazing Educational Resources](#)
- [National Geographic primary resources](#)
- [Updates and press releases](#) from the Department for Education.

Leisure and play

- Activity Village have made some of their [activity packs](#) free
- [Outdoor people](#) - lots of ideas for indoor activities related to nature, as well as ideas for the once-a-day walks
- Many museums, zoos and galleries have introduced virtual tours that you can visit from home, why not head over to the [British Museum](#), or the [Science Museum](#) has lots of resources available for children, and [Edinburgh Zoo](#) has a variety of webcams set up for virtual visitors.

Info about coronavirus

- [GOSH](#)
- National Geographic [explainer](#) for children

Keeping children safe and resilient through emergencies and crises can take its toll on parents too. Be sure to take care of yourself. If you feel like you are not coping and need urgent support you can reach out to Samaritans 24 listening service 116 123.

You can find up to date and detailed health and coronavirus information through the World Health Organization.