

Supporting Your Child During the Time of COVID-19

What are some of the most important things I can do to support my child during the time of COVID-19?

Above all, it is important that you make yourself available to your child. They need to know that they have somebody who will listen to them. When your child vocalizes their worries, suggest coping strategies, such as learning breathing exercises or participating in fun activities (see below). However, your child may not talk about their concerns readily, so it is also important to look out for clues that they may want to talk. For example, your child may hover around you while you complete household tasks. Additionally, make sure your child feels safe and supported. Offer lots of love and affection and let your child know that you care about them by spending time with them doing something special. Finally, take care of yourself. Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events, so it is important that you address your own anxiety and stress in a healthy way.



Why is it important to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic with my child?

It is likely that your child has already overheard conversation regarding COVID-19 and may feel anxious, scared, or confused. When children are given the opportunity to talk about their feelings with a trusted adult, these feelings become less overwhelming, upsetting, and scary.



How should I explain COVID-19 to my child?

Start by asking your child what they have heard about COVID-19. Encourage them to vocalize their feelings and questions, and let these feelings and questions guide the discussion. After your child has shared their thoughts, share age-appropriate facts and correct any misinformation they may have heard. Tips for talking about COVID-19 with children and youth of different age groups can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Next, reassure your child that they are safe. If true, remind them that your family is healthy. Tell them that things will be okay and that adults are working hard to keep everybody safe and well. Finally, emphasize simple things that your family can do to keep everybody safe (see next page).

Focusing on ways your child can take direct action will make them feel empowered and in control and help them to manage their feelings. At the end of the discussion, tell your child that you will continue to keep them updated and check if they have any remaining questions or concerns.

The following resources may be helpful in explaining COVID-19 to your child. A free, downloadable children's book about the coronavirus can be found [here](#). This book is available in several languages and includes activities and coloring for children. A comic that explores the coronavirus can be found [here](#). A video that explains the coronavirus in simple terms can be found [here](#). Finally, an example of how one mother explained the coronavirus to her children can be found [here](#).



How should I respond to my child's questions about COVID-19?


Welcome questions from your child. When your child asks a question, answer honestly and as simply as possible. Don't avoid questions you don't know the answer to--it is okay to tell your child that you don't know. It is important for children to learn how to tolerate uncertainty.

It can sometimes be difficult to answer questions raised by younger children. If you have a toddler, the following resources may be helpful in responding to their questions about COVID-19. For responses to common questions toddlers may ask about COVID-19, click [here](#). For responses to your toddler's questions about masks, click [here](#). For a guide to answering your toddler's questions about grief and death, click [here](#).



Are there any topics I should avoid discussing around my child?

Avoid "scary talk" about COVID-19 around younger children. They are often listening, even when you are not aware they can hear you. Similarly, do not share your worries in front of younger children. They will be able to sense your stress, and your own worries will be transmitted to them. Finally, limit your child's exposure to media reports about COVID-19 by monitoring their television viewing and social media exposure. These reports are often overwhelming and could increase your child's anxiety regarding COVID-19.



How can I tell if my child is exhibiting a "normal" response to the pandemic?

It is important that you maintain awareness of your child's mental health by monitoring both verbal and nonverbal cues. Keep in mind that how children react to a crisis and the way they express their reaction differ by child. Fear, confusion, and anxiety are commonly experienced by children in response to a stressful event, such as a pandemic, but most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions, such as the development of severe anxiety or depression. Risk factors for these intense reactions include, but are not limited to, pre-existing mental health problems, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. In extreme cases, it may be necessary to contact a professional. For a list of warning signs that indicate you should contact a professional, click [here](#). Keep in mind that if your child is acting differently, it is not because you did something wrong. They may begin to regress in their behavior or constantly cling to you. These behaviors serve to reduce their anxiety as they seek a safe and secure environment.



What can I do to reduce my child's anxiety regarding COVID-19?

Anxiety is commonly experienced by children in response to a stressful event, such as a pandemic. There are several steps you can take to reduce your child's anxiety regarding COVID-19. Firstly, be calm and reassuring. Emphasize strengths, hope, and positivity. For example, discuss how the pandemic has allowed many people to spend valuable time with their families. Additionally, validate your child's feelings and encourage them to engage in activities that may help them to manage their feelings (see below). It is also important to share factual information about COVID-19 with your child. Discussing factual information, such as the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease, can give your child a sense of control and reduce their anxiety regarding COVID-19. Finally, it is important for your child's well-being that daily routines are kept as consistent as possible. For example, you can create a daily schedule for your child to follow. This consistency and structure will help to reduce your child's anxiety.



What are some fun activities I can do with my child during the time of COVID-19?

Doing fun activities with your child will make their days more enjoyable and may help in reducing their anxiety regarding COVID-19. There are plenty of activities that adhere to current health and safety guidelines. For example, your child may enjoy the multitude of free, virtual activities that are available online. For examples of such activities, click [here](#) and [here](#). For examples of activities for different age groups, click [here](#). You and your child can also participate in certain outdoor activities, such as taking a walk around the neighborhood, having a picnic, or hiking at a local park. However, when participating in outdoor activities, make sure you are adhering to the health and safety guidelines of your state. Finally, you can encourage your child to engage in creative ways to connect with friends and family. For example, they could write letters or video conference using platforms such as FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom.

Is it okay if my child's screen time increases during the time of COVID-19?

It is likely that your child's screen time will increase as they spend more time at home. You cannot entertain your child constantly, especially if you are working from home. This is okay! There are several ways that you can make screen time more beneficial for your child. Encourage your child to engage in fun, educational activities online and to watch at least some educational programming each day. If you are with your child, discuss what is happening on the screen with them. Additionally, make sure that your child is still engaging in a mix of other activities, such as art projects, reading, and outdoor activities.



How can I prevent myself from yelling at my child when I get angry or frustrated?

Parents are likely to experience more anger and frustration during the time of COVID-19 as families are spending more time at home together and facing increased levels of stress. Parents can attempt to prevent such feelings from arising by monitoring their diet, activity level, and sleep, all of which impact mood and could contribute to parents' outbursts. Similarly, parents should recognize conditions under which they get angry or frustrated and try to avoid such conditions. If you do experience anger or frustration as a parent, pause and reflect on your feelings before responding to your child in order to prevent an outburst. However, if you do yell at your child, wait to apologize until everybody, including yourself, has calmed down and let your child know that you will work hard to avoid such a scenario in the future.



What are some healthy lifestyle practices I should implement in my household?

There are several things your family can do to stay healthy and to avoid spreading COVID-19. For example, avoid close contact with people who are sick, wash your hands often with soap and water, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. For an extensive list of health and safety precautions your family can take to stay healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic, click [here](#). Share these new household rules and practices with your child without communicating fear. Abide by these rules yourself and be patient with your child as they adapt to a new way of living.

Sources:

- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR3KdtouZvPEq1s3-6fsiBfZ4OmZDhdVC0Y46B8BEBZO-PfZscJ7o69Pkw>
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