



# Talking With Children About the Coronavirus

With all the news about the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, children may worry about getting sick themselves or be concerned about the wellness of their family and friends. We recommend having a conversation with your children to help reduce their fear and anxiety.

Here are some tips for talking with children about COVID-19. Remember that children will react to both *what* you say and *how* you say it.

## Communicate

- Create an opportunity for your children to speak openly.
- Give your children a choice on times of the day to have this conversation.
- Have the conversation in a safe place, such as the kitchen, living room, dining room, etc. Try to not host hard conversations, like this, in bedrooms or playrooms to maintain emotional safety.
- Have a creative activity prepared (art, music or play activity) to help your children process this information.

## Ask

- Ask what your child and/or teen already knows about COVID -19 from peers, social media, news, etc.
- Find out what your children wants to know.
- Acknowledge what they share with you and how there is a lot of attention focused on the virus right now.

## Inform

- Be honest with your children that there is information we do not know about the virus.
- Focus on information that is known about the virus, such as:
  - When someone gets sick with the virus, it shows up in the body like a cold or flu.

- To protect our safety, many things in our environment have changed. Explain the concept of physical distancing:
  - Discuss some of the changes in the way we need to behave: not going to school, after school programs, homes of family and friends, restaurants, parks, etc.
  - Discuss that family and friends cannot come to the house. Also acknowledge that we are not able to visit loved ones on hospice service, if that person is not living at home with you.
  - Mention that people may be wearing masks on their faces and gloves on their hands. This is to protect our bodies from germs.
- Empower children with ways that they can help to maintain safety:
  - To reduce the virus or these germs from spreading, it is necessary to stay at home. That means there are places we love but cannot visit, like school, parks, beaches, malls, restaurants, etc.
  - Talk about the importance of handwashing. Choose a 20-second song that can be used while practicing handwashing.

## Normalize

- Acknowledge the fear, sadness, confusion and/or any other emotions that your child may be experiencing.
- Model and share with your child that you are also feeling this way. Give concrete examples. ("I am sad that you cannot see your friends right now, too. I'm wondering how I can help you to stay connected.")

## Plan

- Provide choices on things your children can do:
  - Suggest creating a daily schedule that includes physical movement, connecting with family and friends, play, arts and crafts, music, projects, etc.
  - Ask your children to pick a time when you will talk again about their COVID-19 concerns.
- Reassure your children that you will continue to share new information and that their questions are always welcomed.

