



Talking with Children & Youth about COVID-19

As conversations and media coverage about COVID-19 increase, children, youth and adults alike may experience a range of emotions. You'll find some information and tips to help families and those working with children to support the well-being of our children and youth.

You may notice that children/youth appear:

- Anxious
- Worried about themselves, their family, and friends getting ill with COVID-19
- Preoccupied with illness
- Have a need for reassurance
- Tired or experience disturbances in their sleep
- Have a range of physical complaints (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, etc)
- Less/More hungry or experience changes in their eating habits
- Forgetful or have difficulty concentrating
- Less able to self-regulate

Parents, family members, and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children/youth make sense of what they hear in a way that provides developmentally-appropriate and factual information about the local situation ([KFLA Public Health](#); [Hastings Prince Edward Public Health](#)), validating children/youth's feelings, and helping children/youth to feel some level of control.

We can also model for children and youth the importance of our Catholic Social Teachings, Virtues and Values especially compassion, love, hope

and our collective responsibility for the wellbeing and dignity of the persons around us.

It's important to note that all of us are affected to some degree by this pandemic, and depending on our personal circumstances there may be more or less cause for concern. In any case, remember to pause, and take the time you need and deserve to rest and relax, to connect with family and friends, and to do the things that [help you to stay well](#).

General Principles for Talking to Children & Youth

- Remain calm and reassuring: Remember that children/youth will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- Make yourself available to listen and to talk: Make time to talk. Be sure children/youth know they can come to you when they have questions.
- Take time to validate their concerns with your words and your attention.
- Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma: Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.
- Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online: Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to experiencing increased anxiety.
- Provide information that is honest and accurate: Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child. For example, "COVID-19 is a new virus. Doctors and scientists are still learning about it. Recently, this virus has made a lot of people sick. Scientists and doctors think that

most people will be k, especially kids, but some people might get pretty sick. Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy. For many people, being sick with COVID-19 would be a little bit like having the flu. People can get a fever, cough, or have a hard time taking deep breaths. Most people who have gotten COVID-19 have not gotten very sick. From what doctors have seen so far, most children don't seem to get very sick. While a lot of adults get sick, most adults get better. If you do get sick, it doesn't mean you have COVID-19. People can get sick from all kinds of germs. What's important to remember is that if you do get sick, adults will help get you any help that you need.”

- Focus on the details that are most relevant and/or things that you and your child can control. Limit conversations with/around them about things they cannot control or help with.
- Talk to children/youth about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information and correct misinformation.
- Teach children/youth everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.
- Remind children/youth to stay away from people who are coughing, sneezing or sick.
- Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash right away.
- Remind them to keep their hands out of their mouth, nose, and eyes. This will help keep germs out of their body.
- Discuss any new actions that may be taken to help protect children/youth and adults (e.g., increased hand washing, cancellation of events or activities).

- Teach children to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol.
- Keep things clean. Older children can help adults at home clean the things we touch the most, like desks, doorknobs, light switches, and remote controls.
- If you feel sick, stay home. Just like you don't want to get other people's germs in your body, other people don't want to get your germs either.

Related Links

[Talking to Your Anxious Child about COVID-19](#) - Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)

[Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19](#) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe](#) – American Psychological Association (APA)

Are you looking for easy, helpful tools to practice healthy habits with your children?

[Check out these PBS KIDS videos, games and activities all about hand washing and staying healthy...](#)