

## Talking to children about coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Mirabel children in your care are probably seeing and hearing a lot about coronavirus (COVID-19) on TV, radio, and social media, as well as from other people. Talking with the children in your care about coronavirus (COVID-19) can help children understand and cope with what's going on.

Here are some helpful tips from [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au) on how to talk with children about the coronavirus.



### **Make time to talk**

Find the right time to talk with your child. This might be when your child gets home from school, at bedtime or in the car. When your child is ready to talk, give your child your full attention.

### **Find out what your child knows**

It's a good idea to start by asking your child what she knows about the virus and whether she has any questions. For example, 'On the news today, they were talking about coronavirus. Were people at school talking about that? What were they saying?'

### **Explain coronavirus (COVID-19) in a way your child can understand**

- Use a calm, reassuring tone and stick to the facts.
- For younger children, keep it simple and brief. For example, 'That's right, some people are getting sick with a germ. It makes them cough and sneeze. The sick people are being looked after well by doctors and hospitals'.
- For older children, offer more detail. For example, 'I heard you talking with your friends about how you catch coronavirus. The virus spreads through things like sneezing, coughing and touching infected things. That's why good hygiene and hand-washing are really important. They help to protect everyone.'

### **Tune into your child's feelings**

Some children might not be worried about coronavirus (COVID-19). But some might be frightened, upset or worried. They might be worried about the virus itself or about how it might affect their lives.

Ask your child how he's feeling and listen to what he says. You can also ask him what he needs to feel better. It might reassure your child if you share your own feelings and let him know what you're doing to cope with them.

For example:

- 'I can see that you're worried about grandpa getting really sick. I love how caring you are. If anyone we know gets sick, the hospital will take good care of them. Right now, I could really do with a cuddle from you.'
- 'It can be scary not knowing what's going to happen with the virus. Scientists all over the world are working hard to find a vaccine and treatment. In Australia, we have good hospitals, doctors and nurses who can look after us.'
- 'It's OK to be worried about catching coronavirus. I sometimes worry too. Some people are only getting minor symptoms like what you get when you have a cold. If I need some good information, I look at the health department website.'
- 'It's disappointing we can't go to the footy on the weekend. But the doctors say that this will help stop the spread of coronavirus, so this is how we can help. Let's watch the footy on TV together.'

It's important to monitor how much media coverage about coronavirus (COVID-19) you and your child are seeing. It's not helpful for anyone to hear distressing news over and over again. If you have the facts you need, it's often best to switch off or switch to something else.

### **Where to get reliable information about coronavirus (COVID-19)**

It's best to get your information about coronavirus (COVID-19) from up-to-date, accurate and reliable sources including the **Australian, state and territory health departments**:

- [Australian Government Department of Health – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health alert](#)
- [NSW Health – COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#)
- [Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services – Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

For more information about coronavirus and talking to children please visit [raisingchildren.net.au](https://raisingchildren.net.au)

It's natural to worry about what coronavirus (COVID-19) might mean for your family. If you're worried and need support, please contact us at the Mirabel foundation or you could talk to your GP or a local counsellor. You can also call Lifeline on 131 114 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was reviewed by Associate Professor Nigel Crawford, paediatrician and immunisation medicine specialist, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and the University of Melbourne; and Associate Professor Jill Sewell, paediatrician, the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.

### **References**

Australian Government Department of Health (2020). Coronavirus (COVID-19) – what you need to know. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved 16 March 2020 from <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know>.

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