

How to Talk to Your Kids about COVID-19

A Thoughtful Approach to Conversations

10 Tips to Help Your Kids Feel Safe, Not Scared

Schools and community organizations around the country have begun announcing closures due to coronavirus (COVID-19). If you are a parent, you likely started thinking about how your children may have been impacted by the news. However, we've heard from many parents who feel uncertain how to talk to their children about COVID-19. You may feel tempted to avoid talking to your children about COVID-19. But between the news, social media, other kids, and school announcements, your children are probably more aware of what's going on than you realize. You do more to love them by being thoughtful about how you approach such conversations than by avoiding them. Here are ten practical tips for talking with your children about COVID-19 so that they feel safe, not scared.

1. PREPARE YOURSELF

Take steps to make sure your needs are being met by other adults—don't put that burden on your children. Keep in mind that children often follow their parents' lead when it comes to responding to a crisis. Children are like sponges and absorb their parents' reactions, words, and energy. Talking about difficult issues like COVID-19 isn't easy. If you're feeling anxious, that's natural. Part of the reason is that you're having your own feelings about what you or your family may be facing. And you may be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing—remind yourself that it's okay to struggle and even to make mistakes. But also remember that you are there for your children, not the other way around. Before you share with your kids, give yourself the time you need to notice and process those feelings, so that you can be fully present to your children's needs and feelings.

2. ENCOURAGE FAITH

Helping our children hold onto faith will help cultivate peace, meaning, and purpose amidst concerns they may have about COVID-19. Let them know it's common to feel confused and nervous during trying times. Share encouraging stories, songs, scriptures or prayers. Seek to maintain spiritual routines or practices in the home and community. Remind them that God is with us even in difficult times.

3. PRAY & PREPARE TOGETHER

By praying together, you are modeling for your children what it looks like to put your faith in God and to trust God above all else. Praying together helps you and your children access a wellspring of hope. You are not going through this alone: you're with each other, and God is with you. Offering up our prayers helps remind children of God's love and of the truth that we are not alone when we feel scared. Then model healthy ways your family can take together to help reduce your family's risk to COVID-19.

CONTACTS & UPDATES

HDI's website and social media accounts provide ongoing updates and resources for preparing your church for COVID-19.

Email: hdi@wheaton.edu

Facebook: [facebook.com/WheatonHDI](https://www.facebook.com/WheatonHDI)

Twitter: twitter.com/WheatonHDI

Instagram: [@wheaton_hdi](https://www.instagram.com/wheaton_hdi)

4. READ THE BIBLE TOGETHER

The Bible has lots to say about God's love, especially in times of adversity. Bible stories together through this lens, we can discover what God has to say about what faithfully responding and loving our neighbors during difficult times looks like. Here are some passages to read together and discuss as a family (e.g., Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:18, 20; 2 Timothy 1:7). Read each story several times, having a few family members take a turn. After you read through the passage a few times, ask questions that encourage your children to imaginatively inhabit the story. For example, have them identify setting and characters, ask them to pick characters they like most and least and explain why, and ask what sensory details they imagine. Answer any questions they might have, or consult a resource to find answers together. End with prayer to help you make the lessons of the story real in your lives.

5. BE HOPEFUL

Seek to instill hope among your family. Keep in mind that hope doesn't mean everything is going to work out how you long for things to be. Hope doesn't mean the problem will go away. Instead think of hope as what keeps you going in the face of adversity, and as Christians our ultimate hope is that we cannot be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Instill hope into the conversation by embracing what has helped your family find strength, meaning, and comfort in other difficult situations. At the same time, resist the temptation to minimize possible challenges your family and community might be facing. The goal is to strike a tone that is hopeful and honest.

6. USE AGE-APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Recognize your child's developmental ability to understand the situation. When your children ask questions, answer them to the best of your ability, using words and concepts that are appropriate for their developmental stages. Likewise, be sure to create space for questions your children might have. It's normal to be scared of inviting questions, as you likely have more questions than answers yourself. That's okay, but be honest if you don't know what to say by letting them know that you don't know. And when possible, assure them that that you'll look into it and get back to them. (If you make this promise, make sure you follow through.) Be authentic with your children, but remember to talk to your children as children, not as adults.

7. PROVIDE REASSURANCE

Sometimes children may feel responsible for events that are entirely beyond their control. When it's not clear that there is a plan in place to face COVID-19, children may, in some way, feel they must bear the weight of that responsibility. When you reassure children that the adults are managing the situation, you give them permission to be children.

8. TRY TO MAINTAIN ROUTINES

COVID-19 is already quickly starting to disrupt daily life for many families across the United States. Taking small steps to help our students regain some sort of normalcy will help them cope more effectively. This does not mean ignoring what has occurred, but rather trying to maintain some structure in our interactions. Familiar activities, schedules, and routines can go a long way in helping your children feel secure. There is something soothing and healing even in mundane day-to-day life rhythms.

9. DISCUSS WHAT THEY ARE HEARING

Kids pick up on more than we realize. With COVID-19 so heavily in the news, odds are they have heard things on TV, at school, at church, or from you that they don't fully understand. Whether it's in the car, at the dinner table, or while playing ping-pong, ask your children questions like: *Have you heard anything new about coronavirus? Who did you hear it from?* Listen carefully, affirm their feelings about what they're hearing, help fill in any knowledge gaps, and answer questions they may have.

10. MONITOR AND LIMIT MEDIA EXPOSURE

Young children's media exposure should be very limited. Parents may wish to monitor their child's time online and depending on their age, use of social networking sites. Presently there is a lot of unhelpful and incorrect information online, take steps to monitor what your children are reading, hearing, and watching. This may also include parents monitoring and appropriately limiting their own exposure to anxiety provoking information.

Contributors:

Jamie Aten, Ph.D., is founder and executive director of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute at Wheaton College. Follow on Twitter at [@drjamieaten](#) or visit [jamieaten.com](#).

Kent Annan, M.Div., is director of Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership at Wheaton College. Follow on Twitter at [@kentannan](#) or visit [kentannan.com](#).