

A Resource to Parents from the Guidance Department
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Parenting is the hardest job in the world, and times like this can be the most challenging of all. While some children may be relatively unaffected and view the school closure as an extended vacation, others may have real, serious concerns about what they hear or see, relatives at high-risk, or just not cope well with change. Children's experiences can be as varied and as intense as those of adults. Keeping the lines of communication open among all family members is an important first step to helping each other through difficult times.

In an effort to support you and your children, please see below some guidelines to help manage the impact of recent events, as well as tips on how to talk with your children about COVID-19. More detailed information can be found in the articles linked throughout this document.

1. **Children take their emotional cues from adults.** As we've learned from Open Circle, one's nonverbal messages are just as important (if not more so) than one's verbal messages. If your child sees you in a panic, s/he will likely experience a lot more fear and anxiety than if s/he observes you being careful, cautious, and thoughtful, but calm. To help maintain a calm atmosphere at home, practice "belly breaths," "balloon breathing," or "flower breathing," and practice this [diaphragmatic breathing](#) together for a few minutes each day.
2. **Maintain as much of a normal routine as possible.** Even though your child won't be going to school, try to maintain the same scheduled wake-up time and mealtimes. Suggest that your child work on schoolwork in the order of his/her regular school day schedule (Some may prefer to exercise control and change the order instead. Whichever works for you and your child is fine.) Make sure mealtimes and bedtimes are consistent and that you and your child are getting enough sleep. These efforts can go a long way in helping everyone cope with the stress that comes with a change of this magnitude.
3. **Consider monitoring your child's exposure to various news media,** whether by TV, internet, or social media. Constantly watching for status updates about COVID-19 or other closures can increase anxiety. Furthermore, some information can be inappropriate for young ears and/or difficult for them to understand, which also increases confusion and anxiety. Make time to "unplug" with your child and play a game, read a book, or watch a movie instead.
4. **Don't be afraid to discuss COVID-19.** Most children have already heard about it, so it's best to make sure they have the [facts](#). Focus on [what we can do](#) to remain well, like washing your hands frequently, avoiding touching your face, keeping distance between yourself and others, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and cleaning and

disinfecting surfaces daily. While it may be tempting to avoid talking about COVID-19, remember that for some children, *not* talking about it can actually make them worry *more*.

5. **Be developmentally appropriate.** A conversation about COVID-19 with a sixth grader is likely to sound different than a conversation with a second grader. If you find it hard to know how much to say, take your cues from your child. Ask him/her to tell you what s/he already knows. This will give you an idea of the level of detail s/he is interested in, as well as the language s/he is already using about the topic. Answer questions slowly and thoughtfully, taking care not to offer more information than was requested. If you receive confused or inquisitive looks in return, invite another question. And remember, it's ok to say you don't know.
6. **Avoid the blame game.** Fear has a tendency to leave people feeling out of control. One way we feign control over the unknown is to fabricate stories about who or what is to blame. Unfortunately in these situations, innocent groups are made to suffer the consequences. Be mindful of your and your child's language. Address any instances of blame immediately by recognizing them as an unfounded attempt to assuage fear.
7. **Encourage your child to keep talking.** Even after having the conversation once, children can be reluctant to broach a difficult topic a second or third time. Remember to check in with your child every day or two to see if they've thought of any new questions or developed any new concerns. This can go a long way to helping your child feel safe talking with you about *anything*.

For more detailed information on the above, please visit:

1. [Open Circle: How to Talk to Kids About Coronavirus](#)
2. [Child Mind Institute: Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)
3. [National Association of School Psychologists: Talking to Children About COVID-19](#)
4. [CDC: Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
5. [Parenting During Coronavirus: What to Know about Play Dates, Education and More](#)
6. [Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus](#)