



A Resource Guide for Talking to Children about COVID-19

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October 2020

With the world in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, caregivers, who can be parents or those who are providing direct care for children, are seeking trusted sources of information to help them explain this disease. Families want to know how to talk about prevention, transmission, and treatment with their children, as well as how to ease children's worries and fears. This resource guide reflects some of the work of our current NSF-funded research study (NSF#2029209) about the communication needs of children and families during this time, seeking to understand how they are supported in having conversations about the coronavirus and pandemic-related topics. At the beginning of this study, we conducted a literature review to inform our research and guide our analysis of the data collected from families. During the process, we realized that many of the documents, articles, and online resources we reviewed could be beneficial for other researchers, child-focused practitioners, media producers, and caregivers -- giving insights on not just *what* to say to children during this challenging time, but *how* to say it.

This resource guide summarizes four key takeaways for having conversations about COVID-19. The resources used to inform these takeaways are listed at the end of this document and range from particular science or health topics to culturally appropriate ways to engage in conversations about the disease with children and families.

Key takeaways for talking about COVID-19

1) Center the child in the conversation

Conversations with children should include their perspective(s) and be attentive to their respective age and/or developmental level.

- Start conversations from where the child is at/what their interests are, and use their responses to direct the conversation.
- Keep explanations as clear and simple as possible. Provide just enough, but not too much information. Make sure to define any terms and use topical words/concepts so the child can understand and engage in the discussion.
- Convey information in an interesting and fun way, if possible. Children engage best through stories, play, humor, etc. Anything that can make it relatable to their life and experiences are helpful.
- Encourage children to ask questions and keep the conversation focused on what they bring up. This is also a way to assess what children already know and what questions/concerns they have.
- Promote self-efficacy. Encourage positive actions that kids can do such as preventative measures to minimize the risk of getting themselves and others sick (e.g. washing hands, wearing a mask). Continue to discuss with them how kids can stay safe and focus on the things they are doing to stay safe.
- Keep the message positive about what the world is doing to try and stop the spread of the virus. Look for stories with positive, familiar images of diverse groups and workers

who are caring for sick people and helping out in many ways. Share ways that local, state, and national leaders and/or communities are taking action. Using an optimistic approach and ending conversations on a good note can help children feel prepared to deal with the many changes to their world, now and in the future.

- 2) Address socio-emotional needs to support the child through their experience of the pandemic
Conversations that take into account the unique emotional needs of children, and make an effort to be responsive to their mental health and wellbeing, can help ease their anxiety.
 - Model calmness when talking about the topics related to the pandemic. Give the child the space they need to process what is happening.
 - Reassure children that adults are there to keep them safe--the adults in their household, at their school, in their communities, and around the world (e.g. scientists, etc.). Let them know that adults are available to answer questions later on or to support them in any way, in order to build children's trust and lessen their anxiety.
 - Encourage kids to express their feelings. Validate children's emotions and acknowledge their feelings, stressing that whatever they feel right now is okay. Try to calm fears by addressing what is causing worry. Consider other ways that children may also express their feelings (e.g. using play to act out how they're feeling about what they're experiencing).

- 3) Challenge misleading or hurtful information about COVID-19 and communities
Conversations that equip children with trustworthy information, rather than rumor and biases, help children have confidence in what they know and can encourage empathy for others.
 - Avoid stereotyping or making negative statements about people or countries. Explore what may cause biased thinking and address it directly. No one is to blame for the pandemic because of their race, nationality, or ethnicity.
 - Explain that it's possible anyone can get COVID-19. It has nothing to do with how someone looks, where they live, or what language they speak.
 - Promote acceptance of and compassion for others at this time. Discuss the many characteristics, values, and experiences they may have in common with other children who are also going through this difficult time.
 - Provide truthful and accurate information about the pandemic. Be honest if you don't know the answer to their question. Take care to not make up information or lie about anything. Children will feel a better sense of control when they are in the know.
 - Discuss why everything they hear may not be true/reliable - about the reasons people may say incorrect things about COVID (e.g. fear of something they don't understand). Talk about how to distinguish between reliable sources/accurate information and rumor/incorrect guesses. Gently correct inaccurate information they may hear and repeat. Point them to reliable sources of information.

- 4) Pay particular attention to and draw from cultural contexts during conversations
Conversations that include cultural perspectives and/or community experiences of the pandemic are beneficial to children's broader understanding of what is happening. As a reminder, culture does not equal community but they are also not mutually exclusive (e.g. a refugee community made up of different cultures).
 - Draw on existing cultural values/beliefs, traditions/rituals/practices, stories, activities, etc. to ground the conversation and relate it to children's lives.

- Remind children of the strength and resilience of their own and others' communities and the cultural tools/strategies/knowledge that communities already have to navigate challenging situations and times of crisis.
- Connect the pandemic to other hardships/struggles that communities have already overcome in the past. Here are some examples: the Great Depression; Japanese internment camps; and American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s.
- Talk about community care and collective action during times of crisis. Identify actions that could help build community, like taking care of each other -- especially those who are most vulnerable. Emphasize the interconnectedness of communities.
- Adapt health and safety guidelines that work for the child's home situation. Talk about all of the creative ways to stay safe that make sense alongside the child's cultural norms and community practices.

List of Resources for talking about COVID-19

Here are resources that informed the development of this document. Resources that are culturally-specific and/or community-focused are distinguished with bold text.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Source</i>
How to talk to children about the coronavirus	Harvard Health Publishing Blog
Talking with children about coronavirus disease 2019	CDC
How to talk to kids about coronavirus	The New York Times
How to talk to your kids about COVID-19	Mayo Clinic
Tips for discussing coronavirus with your kids	Scimex
Talking to kids about the coronavirus	Child Mind Institute
Talking with children about COVID-19 fact sheet	Urban Indian Health Institute
Talking about COVID-19: Value, problem, solution, action	The Opportunity Agenda
Talking with children: Tips for caregivers, parents, and teachers during infectious disease outbreaks	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
How to talk to kids about COVID-19	Children's Minnesota
Parent/Caregiver guide to helping families cope with the coronavirus disease 2019	The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Coronavirus (COVID-19) parenting tips	UNICEF
Positive parenting during COVID-19	Center for American Indian Health/Johns Hopkins
10 Tips for talking about COVID-19 with your kids	PBS

Resources for supporting children’s emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic	Child Trends
Children’s mental health during lockdowns and isolation	World Vision UK
Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCov outbreak	WHO
Self-Love in the time of coronavirus	COLORLINES
Supporting kids during the coronavirus crisis	Child Mind Institute
How to help your child build resilience against coronavirus anxiety	Thrive Global
How to talk to your anxious child or teen about coronavirus	Anxiety & Depression Association of America
Supporting children during coronavirus	National Child Traumatic Stress Network
How to help your young child cope with the pandemic	Harvard Health Publishing
Countering COVID-19 (coronavirus) stigma and racism: Tips for parents and caregivers	National Association of School Psychologists
Antiracist parenting during COVID-19	YES! Media
Ring the alarm: COVID-19 presents grave danger to communities of color	COLORLINES
Why you should talk to your child about the coronavirus	Vox
Talking to kids about coronavirus, the virus that causes the disease COVID-19	Institute for Child Success
Cultural competency and COVID-19	Quality Interactions
We need a culturally responsive approach to COVID-19	Northern California Public Media
Decolonizing community care in response to COVID-19	NDN Collective
COVID-19 in newly settled refugee populations	CDC
Community care during COVID-19, A message to and from AAPIS	Medium
Women of color will save us all	Medium

This material is based upon collaborative work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 2029209 titled *RAPID: Addressing Families’ Covid-19 Information and Education Needs Through Podcast Media*. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. For more information about this ongoing study, please see our [General Findings Report](#).