



Talking to your Children about COVID-19

We are all exposed to more information than ever before. Children are going to see and hear about this pandemic, even as we try to limit their media exposure. They are also experiencing a disruption to their regular schedules which may make them feel afraid, frustrated, or sad. Providing a safe, calming space to open a dialogue with your child can help ensure that they are getting accurate information, and allows for them to talk about whatever emotions they may be feeling.

The following tips may help you when discussing the COVID-19 pandemic with your child.

Reduce media access

Try to limit your child's exposure to media at this time. Hearing about cases and deaths due to this virus can be stressful for adults, teenagers, and young children. While you should still access information, try to limit how much and how graphic the news reports are. To stay up-to-date on information without keeping the tv on, sign up for news alerts on your phone.

Familiarize yourself before speaking to your child

Before speaking with your child, try to ensure that you have accurate information. By understanding what is happening, you will be able to offer simple, clear, and appropriate knowledge to your child in a way that also addresses any misconceptions they may have. Say "I don't know" if you don't know.

Begin by asking your child what they know

Give your child a chance to voice what they believe is happening. This will allow you to listen for any misinformation, address areas needing clarification, and hear what concerns or fears your child is currently processing.

Try to ensure that your message is age-appropriate

Children process information differently depending on their age. While young children will likely hear about COVID-19, the details may be too overwhelming or intense for them to deal with. Older children may need more information and details in order to draw their own responses and conclusions. For this reason, it's important to use language your child understands, and contextualize these events in the world that your child is living in.

Ask questions, and encourage your child to ask too

It's important that you allow your child to absorb the information you're giving them and give them time to respond. Asking your child questions that addresses this pandemic and how it's made them feel can give your child the opportunity to talk about their emotions without your influence. Additionally, allowing your child to ask questions will encourage them to speak freely about their concerns without judgement, while establishing trust for future conversations.

Validate their feelings

Pandemics such as COVID-19 are not everyday occurrences and can cause us to feel fear, confusion, shock, anger and more. These responses are normal and valid. Be patient as your child finds their words to describe how they are feeling. By allowing your child to talk about their emotions, you are acknowledging that it is ok to feel many conflicting and intense emotions, while also granting them the time and space to process, acknowledge and voice how they have internalized these events.

Share your feelings and experiences

COVID-19 is also a new experience for you, and your own responses may vary day to day. It is often helpful to share some of your own feelings and responses surrounding the events. Sharing with older children also allows you to discuss ways in which you validate and calm yourself when you feel overwhelmed. This can add perspective to your child's experience, and can reassure them that they will get through these feelings and fears.

Look at positive community solutions together

Try talking to your child about the different ways they can contribute positively to the 'Shelter in Place.' This can mean talking about virtually reaching out to those who are vulnerable or lonely to talk, contacting their school or community organizations to discuss ways they can help, or collaborating with other families in your community to create a safe space to talk. By allowing your child to look at ways that they can contribute, you are empowering your child to feel in control of what they can do, instead of what they can't.

Express affection and support

Acknowledge and empower your child for the resilient ways that they have responded to changes in their lives. Validate their positive reactions to their altered school or daily schedule. Ensure that you use supportive words ("It will be okay," "You are safe,"). Hearing these words can help your child to cope with their fears and be reassured. Asking for a hug, can also alleviate fear and help to calm an anxious mind.

Be Well at Work Work-Life is committed to supporting you with your family needs at this time. If you require parenting or familial resources, please contact Karen Patchell at kpatchell@berkeley.edu