



Counselor's Corner

Talking to Kids About Coronavirus

As public discussions about the Coronavirus increases, children may start to worry that people close to them will get the virus. Parents and other trusted adults can help children make sense of the information they are hearing. It is important to provide children with information that is honest and accurate without giving too much information that may increase their anxiety.

It might be helpful to ask them what they already know so that you can correct misinformation they may have heard from friends, the news, or social media. Try to keep information simple and remind them that health and school officials are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy. Below are some prevention strategies:

Preventative Strategies

1. Explain what COVID-19 is?

- COVID-19 is the short name for “coronavirus disease 2019.” It is a new virus. Doctors and scientists are still learning about it.
- Recently, this virus has made a lot of people sick. Scientists and doctors think that most people will be ok, especially kids, but some people might get pretty sick.
- Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy.
- Please watch the [Coronavirus BrainPop video](#) and read the National Public Radio’s story, “[Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#)”.



2. Remain calm and reassuring.

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others. They are listening even when it appears they are not. For example, while they are playing on their devices, they hear and absorb everything.

3. Make yourself available to listen and to talk.

- Make time to talk to your child(ren) and make sure your child(ren) knows they can come to you when they have questions. Kids have big questions, and it's okay to answer them. Take cues from your kids and offer clear but concise answers in developmentally appropriate language. Keep the focus on what you are doing to [prepare and prevent the spread of COVID-19](#) (i.e., [proper handwashing](#), avoiding large crowds, [practicing social distancing](#), covering mouth and nose with tissue or sleeve when coughing/sneezing, avoiding interactions with people who are sick, staying home when sick, etc.).



4. Monitor television viewing and social media exposure

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety. Speak to your child about how many stories on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present. Even when it seems like they are not listening, kids pick up on what they hear on the TV and radio. Newscasters' tone of voice can be enough to set off alarm bells for kids, and unfamiliar words like pandemic and outbreak can be fear-inducing. Opt for watching or listening to news reports when kids are in bed or choose to read news articles if possible.

5. Provide information that is honest and accurate.

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine information situations far worse than reality.
- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

6. Teach everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
 - Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
 - Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff (e.g., increased hand washing, cancellation of events or activities).
- 7. Get children into a hand washing habit.**
- Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food. Please watch this [CDC handwashing video](#) to help your child learn more about proper hand washing and reinforce the importance of proper handwashing by participating in this [creative black pepper experiment](#).
 - If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol.
- 8. Maintain normal routine to the extent possible**
- Kids thrive with routines and predictability, as this can be very comforting and reassuring in anxious times and promotes physical health. When some things feel out of control, routines can give kids a sense of security. Seeing a visual schedule similar to what they see in their classrooms can be beneficial, so try using one at home. Write your daily routine on a whiteboard or make a paper schedule together. Set up specific times for reading, homework, chores, independent free time, mealtimes, family time and bedtime. Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed. And make sure you include fun activities in your daily routine! Play board games, play outside, or have silly dance parties.
- 9. Stick to a sleep schedule**
- While it might be tempting for your older children to stay up late every night and sleep late every morning, that is not going to be beneficial to their physical and mental health. You will also be left with very moody children the next day. Stick with your bedtime schedule. Don't forget to enforce no screen time an hour before bed, [Knippenberg recommends](#).
- 10. Start or continue mindfulness practices**
- Mindfulness is an amazing practice for people of all ages. If you don't have a regular mindfulness practice already built in to your family time, try adding it to your routine. This can look like 5-minutes of guided meditation, deep breathing, or mindful coloring (look for apps/websites like Calm, Headspace, Smiling Minds, Mindfulness for children, Mind Yeti, Happy Color). Find a [mindfulness activity](#) that you can all enjoy doing together! Also, here are some [free mindfulness apps](#) worthy of your attention.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [National Association of School Psychologist](#), and [Counselor Keri](#)

Supporting Our Students

Lastly, MCPS continues to add a number of resources to support the physical, social and psychological well-being of students during this difficult time. These resources can be found [here](#).