

# Helping Kids Cope with the Anxiety of COVID-19

*This tips were adapted from Children's Hospital of Orange County pediatric psychologist [Dr. Sabrina Stutz](#)*

## **Meet children's concerns with validation, compassion**

- Listen carefully to their concerns and learn where they heard their information. Validate their fears by saying something like, *"It can be scary when a new illness comes around that we don't know everything about."*
- Gently correct any misconceptions they may have heard and encourage them to continue to ask questions.
- Maintaining a routine can provide children a sense of security. Keeping a usual schedule – including school, activities and chores – will protect mental and physical health.

## **Stick to developmentally appropriate facts**

- Avoid having adult-level conversations about COVID-19 around children. Monitor children's exposure to media reports about the virus.
- Answer questions with brief, easily understood explanations. For example, you might tell a young child, *"coronavirus is a new type of cold/flu, and it is important for us to wash our hands more and sneeze in our elbows to try and stay healthy."*

## **Reassure kids by empowering them**

- Telling kids how they can help provides a sense of teamwork and can turn anxiety around with family goals.
- Reassure children that they can protect themselves and others by practicing proper hand-washing and cough etiquette and taking other healthy [steps](#).
- Kids can also be included in other family-wide preparations. For example, have your child help decide on the weekly meal menu, or what groceries are needed for the week.
- Keep a reasonable daily schedule. Have your child help create the schedule. Here's a sample: <http://thesciencewomen.com/daily-homeschool-schedule-dial-free-printable/>

## **Look for kid-friendly methods**

- Make learning about hand-washing and other preventative measures fun. Help kids learn about germs by giving them some lotion and then sprinkling glitter (or black pepper) on their hands. Tell them the glitter is like germs, and then ask the child to try to wipe it off with a paper towel or water. They won't get far! Explain how soap and warm water removes the glitter - and germs.
- Teach kids how long to wash hands for by singing a 20- to 30-second song together. "Happy Birthday" or "ABCs" or 20 seconds of any favorite song will work.
- Stay healthy with movement. Have a dance party—turn up the music and move!
- If you are looking for some fun, new options check out <https://circuitimefun.com/> for ideas for young children.

## **Emphasize kindness**

- As always, it is helpful to teach kids to continue to be kind to all people. Kindness is always possible – even when they feel afraid. Educate children that most people who are wearing a mask probably don't have the virus.
- It is important to remind children that we are all trying our best to stay healthy and it's not anyone's fault if they get sick.

## **Remember to model positive behavior**

- Parents who show good coping skills can help reassure kids that they are safe. After all, kids learn from their parents how to react in new situations.
- Remember that kids make mistakes. If your child accidentally does not wash their hands or doesn't sneeze into their elbow, gently remind them. Scaring children with the potential consequences of their mistakes is not helpful.
- Model self-care behaviors: Maintain activities and sleep schedules. Eat healthfully and practice hygiene and cough etiquette.
- It's also helpful for grownups to limit their own media consumption around coronavirus (COVID-19) and stick to a few sources such as the Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) to reduce information overload and anxiety.

## **Watch for behavior changes**

- Changes in a child's sleep, appetite, interest in being with friends or leaving the house, or levels of reassurance seeking, as well as excessive hand-washing can be signs that more help is needed.
- If basic stress reduction techniques like deep breathing, distraction or guided imagery don't help, reach out to your primary care provider for additional support.

## **Additional Resources**

- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>
- <https://mailchi.mp/consciousdiscipline/april-6th-covid19-resources?e=4da9e63016>
- <https://confidencemeetsparenting.com/indoor-movement-activities/>