

DISCUSSING COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

The situation being created by COVID-19 is unprecedented. It can be a frightening time – especially for children. Many children may worry about themselves, family and friends getting sick. Parents, family members, school staff and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear. Here are some suggestions about how to have an honest and accurate conversation with children about ways they can avoid getting and spreading the virus:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Acknowledge fear. There is no question - these are challenging times. We are dealing with a virus that is not known to us. We are being asked to stay at home, to limit social gatherings to 5 or fewer people and to remain at a safe distance from others. For most of us, our normal daily routines have turned upside down. Some people may be feeling afraid. That is natural.

Give a sense of control. It's important to know we have tools to help overcome feelings of fear. Each one of us has the power to act and the ability to help protect ourselves and others from the virus. We can do that by following public health direction – practice good hygiene, use social distancing and self-isolate away from others after travel or if we begin to feel unwell. These are simple actions, but they're powerful and they work. Courage and action can help us overcome fear and help stop this virus.

Make kindness a priority. You have the ability to help others who may be feeling fearful. Support our neighbours and people in our communities who may be in need of assistance. Check in with them by phone, text or social media. While it's important to limit in-person contact, we can use technology to connect. Listen, provide reassurance and involve your children in this activity. Doing this is one way to help them feel a sense of control and positivity. This is a time for caring. No one person is responsible for this situation, but we are all part of the solution.

Make yourself available to listen and to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions. Remain calm, reassuring and pay attention to what children see and hear. Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information can lead to anxiety. It's normal to have questions, but use social media wisely and get information from reliable sources.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is COVID-19?

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 very sick. Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy.

What can I do so that I don't get COVID-19?

There are lots of things you can do to help protect yourself from getting COVID-19:

- Now is not a time to be getting together with friends. Stay at home. An adult will go out and do the shopping. If you do go out, stay six feet apart (a little farther than a hockey stick) and keep your group to no more than 5 people at a time.
- Wash your hands a lot. Use soap and water. If you don't have soap and water, have an adult help you use a special hand cleaner.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue. Throw it out right away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- If you feel sick, stay home. Just like you don't want to get other people's germs in your body, other people don't want to get your germs either.

What happens if you get sick with COVID-19?

COVID-19 can look different in different people. For many people, being sick with COVID-19 would be a little bit like having the flu. People can get a fever, cough, or have a hard time taking deep breaths. Most people who have gotten COVID-19 have not gotten very sick. Only a small group of people have had more serious problems.

From what doctors have seen so far, most children don't seem to get very sick. While a lot of adults get sick, most adults get better. If you do get sick, it doesn't mean you have COVID-19. People can get sick from all kinds of germs. What's important to remember is that if you do get sick, the adults at home will help get you any help that you need.

GET ACCURATE INFORMATION

The situation with COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. Find accurate, up-to-date information, including when to seek help at:

- Province of Nova Scotia: novascotia.ca/coronavirus

Other Resources:

- Government of Canada: canada.ca/coronavirus
- The Public Health Agency of Canada Coronavirus Information Line: [1-833-784-4397](tel:1-833-784-4397)