



How to speak to your children about COVID-19

With so much in the news about COVID-19, chances are your daughter has heard about it. You can help your daughter understand what is happening here in Australia and overseas by talking with her directly. Not talking about COVID-19 can make it seem even scarier to a child. You can tailor these ideas for your child's age, development and concerns.

In addition to having School guidelines, we have provided the following information to help your daughter feel supported should she be anxious or distressed regarding the outbreak of COVID-19. We hope you find them of use.

Allow your daughter to express her feelings

- It's ok for your daughter to feel worried – this is a normal response. Please encourage her to talk about how she is feeling.
- Role model speaking about your feelings by telling your daughter about your concerns. Do this in a way that won't scare her. For example, you might tell her that when you heard about COVID-19, you felt sad for the families of people who became sick or died of COVID-19.
- Tell your daughter how you dealt with your feelings and then help her figure out what she might try to comfort herself. You could start by talking about things that worked in the past when your daughter was worried about something else. For example: writing in her journal, spending time with a pet, or playing sport.
- Maintain your normal, healthy routines. Make sure your daughter gets enough rest and physical activity and eats well.

Ask your daughter: What have you heard about COVID-19?

Psychologists who develop plans for helping children deal with [disease outbreaks](#) all agree that it isn't helpful to tell our children that there is nothing going on or that their fears are unfounded, especially when adults are clearly concerned about the potential for a disease to spread and are making changes to their environment.

- Listen for underlying fears or concerns and misinformation your daughter might have. For example, she may ask if it is possible for her to catch COVID-19. Reassure her that in Australia, few people have caught the virus or have died from COVID-19 in comparison to the rest of the world. Explain that many measures have been put in place to contain the spread of the virus.
- Make it a regular conversation, particularly while the topic continues to be covered regularly by the media. Continue to talk with your daughter and answer any new questions she may have about COVID-19.
- Limit your daughter's exposure to news reports and other media, if possible. Your daughter sees a lot of information on the internet, television, and social media. Nonstop exposure makes the risk seem bigger than it is.

Gently correct inaccurate information

- If your daughter has incorrect information or asks you challenging questions about COVID-19, give her the correct information clearly using words she understands. If you are unsure what information is accurate, spend time together researching online or perhaps explain you are unsure and find the accurate information before coming back to her.



- Please refer to reliable sources, such as your GP, your pediatrician, or the NSW Health department. [Click here](#) to visit the NSW Health website.
- Remind your daughter that it is perfectly fine to play with friends or peers at School who may have been to China, Hong Kong, or other places around the world over the holiday break, or who have names that may sound different.

Answer your daughter's questions about COVID-19 in ways that will reassure, not scare her

- Keep your answers simple and direct.
- Carefully think about what answers you can give that will reassure your daughter and alleviate her worries about COVID-19. For example, tell your daughter that even though a lot of people are talking about COVID-19, very few people in Australia have actually become sick or passed away as a result of COVID-19.
- Give your daughter practical advice to help her stay healthy. For example, this is a good time to remind her how important it is for her to:
 - wash her hands for 20 seconds, especially before eating, after going to the bathroom and after touching something that may not be clean
 - avoid close contact with people showing cold or flu-like symptoms
 - avoid unprotected contact with live wild animals e.g. stray bush turkeys!
 - refrain from sharing food with their friends for the time being.

Sharing our safety plans

Dr Susie Burke from the Australian Psychological Society says that when large external events such as natural disasters, bushfire or even infectious disease outbreaks occur, it's important to let children know what our plans are to manage the risk. Make sure to display this plan somewhere in the house or classroom where they can see it and discuss it with them.

"Also giving children practical things to do as a part of the household disaster plan helps children to feel more in control and a bit calmer when an event actually is happening," she says.

She also says it helps to have children to anticipate what they might think or feel and to teach them strategies for how to replace some of their more frightening thoughts, such as the risk of falling ill, with more helpful thoughts.

She suggests some of these thoughts might be: "We've got a plan, we will stay safe, we know what we're going to do and we'll just take it step by step."

If you are concerned about how your daughter is coping and how this will affect her schooling, you can contact your daughter's Year Co-ordinator (for Kindergarten to Year 6) or Head of Year (for Years 7 to 12).

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