

TIP SHEET: DISCUSSING COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

As public conversations around coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate and minimizes anxiety or fear. CDC has created guidance to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES WHEN DISCUSSING COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

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.

AVOID LANGUAGE THAT MIGHT BLAME OTHERS AND LEAD TO STIGMA.

- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT CHILDREN SEE OR HEAR ON TELEVISION, RADIO OR ONLINE.

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

PROVIDE INFORMATION THAT IS HONEST AND ACCURATE.

- 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.

TEACH CHILDREN 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 handwashing, cancellation of events or activities)
- Get children into a handwashing 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.
 - 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, especially in schools and childcare facilities.

Source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases