

# Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are quarantined in our homes. Many of us have children and grandchildren to entertain and keep busy. And are looking for reliable, science-based information on what to do with their children, how to keep them safe and engaged in fun and meaningful activities.

With that in mind, we worked to put together and make available great information and tips to help parents and caregivers to play, teach, entertain their children in these times of pandemic and fear.

Below are links to various age-appropriate information and resources for parents, caregivers to do with children.

Stay well and be safe.

## Emotions and Discussion Tips

- [6 Ways to Help Your Child Manage Their Anxiety during COVID-19](#)  
Written by APA in partnership with the National PTA.

### 6 Ways to Help Your Child

### Manage Their Anxiety During

### COVID-19

By American Psychological Association

COVID-19 has resulted in uncertain times for parents and children, prompting stress about family members health and safety, as well as upending school and work routines. The good news is that help is available to help manage anxiety: Psychological research has shown that there are specific, effective ways to prevent children's anxiety and help them cope.

Here are six tips from our psychologists to help your kids during this crisis:

## **Remain calm and reassuring**

The most crucial first step is to stay calm and check your anxiety levels. Children tend to model behaviors of their parents and caregivers or take on their surrounding stressors. Be aware of your behaviors and think about how your reactions may influence your child. Also, make time to talk to your kids whenever they have questions.

## **Be open and honest**

Even though you may fear that talking to your child about the pandemic will increase their worries, bringing difficult topics into conversation can actually help to quiet stressors, as children can imagine scenarios far worse than reality. Sharing factual and age-appropriate information will help them put the situation into perspective.

As you monitor the news and stay updated with information from credible media outlets and local health authorities, tell your kids what they need to know. If a child's school or favorite park has closed, explain the safety issues behind the closure. While there is no need to share statistics of people infected or the health repercussions, it is important to emphasize self-care.

## Keep a routine

Research suggests that children benefit from schedules and productive activities, so plan activities that will create structure and fun memories. If your child has art class at school, encourage them to draw or paint during their time home. Set aside specific times for reading and doing homework or visiting virtual museums or zoos. Research has also found that spending time in nature has multiple positive effects on children's physical and mental health. So it would be good for the whole family to spend time outside by taking a walk or riding bikes in the neighborhood.

## Manage screen time

In this unprecedented time, extra screen time during the next few weeks won't hurt children. Flexibility is important, so don't feel guilty about relaxing the rules. However, this doesn't mean unlimited screen time. Caregivers should strive for a balance between digital and non-digital activities. For example, if a child spends time on a digital learning activity in the morning, they should take a break for a creative endeavor—like painting or baking cookies—or play a board game with the entire family. Parents should also monitor their own digital device use. Developing these habits now will continue to help children after this extended period at home and away from school.

## **Practice self-care and stay connected**

With an increase in responsibilities and caretaking duties, you need to take care of yourself. Whenever possible, make time to read, exercise and meditate. One of the best ways to manage anxiety is to stay connected with friends and family, so call or video chat them. And check in on other parents and caregivers for open conversation, which gives you a safe space to express any distress or frustrations you may be feeling.

## **Behaviors during stress**

When children and teens are stressed, their behaviors may change. Don't be surprised if your children exhibit mood swings and problems with attention and concentration. This is the time to give your child extra patience and support. You may notice behaviors in children that may be cause for concern, such as your child making physical complaints. They may say they don't feel well or have a headache, which may be their way of expressing their worry or concern. If you or your child feels overwhelmed, it may be time to talk to a licensed mental health professional.

## **More help to manage anxiety**

For additional information on how to manage anxiety and resources on COVID-19, visit [APA's website](#).

*This resource is made possible through a partnership between the American Psychological Association and National PTA to educate parents and teachers about behavioral health and emotional well-being.*

- [How to Talk to Children about Difficult News](#)  
APA Help Center article.

# How to talk to children about difficult news

November 1, 2015

Children's lives are touched by trauma on a regular basis, no matter how much parents or teachers try to keep the "bad things" away. Instead of shielding children from the dangers, violence or tragedies around us, adults should talk to kids about what is happening.

The conversation may not seem easy, but taking a proactive stance, discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help a child feel safer and more secure.

As much as adults may try to avoid difficult topics, children often learn or know when something sad or scary happens. If adults don't talk to them about it, a child may overestimate what is wrong or misunderstand adults' silence. So, be the first to bring up the difficult topic. When parents tackle difficult conversations, they let their children know that they are available and supportive.

## Guide the conversation

Think about what you want to say. It's OK to practice in your head, to a mirror or with another adult. Some advanced planning may make the discussion easier. You won't have to think about it off the top of your head.

Find a quiet moment. Perhaps this is after dinner or while making the next day's lunch. This is time and place where your children can be the center of your attention.

Find out what they know. For example, there was a shooting at a school or a bomb set off in another country. Ask them "What have you heard about this?" And then listen. Listen. Listen. And listen more.

Share your feelings with your child. It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though upset, you can pull yourself together and continue on. Parents hear it often: Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.

Tell the truth. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. You do not need to give graphic details.

For young children, you may need to have the conversation about what death means (no longer feel anything, not hungry, thirsty, scared, or hurting; we will never see them again, but can hold their memories in our hearts and heads).

Say, "I don't know." Sometimes the answer to the question is "I don't know." "Why did the bad people do this?" "I don't know" fits.

Above all, reassure. At the end of the conversation, reassure your children that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe and to watch out for them. Reassure them that you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that they are loved.

# Take care of yourself

Talking about and experiencing difficult news and tragedies can be exhausting. Don't forget to take care of yourself:

- Turn off the news.
- Take a break.
- Engage in physical activity.
- Do something that will lift your spirits and those of your family.

# Seek professional help

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck, overwhelmed or your child shows persistent signs of stress or agitation, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. A mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward.

# Talking to kids about Coronavirus

March 12, 2020

[jasamp AAC](#), [Aided language display](#), [Augmentative and Alternative Communication](#), [Coronavirus](#), [COVID-19](#)

“Kids worry more when they're kept in the dark”

[Rachel Ehmke](#), [Child Mind Institute](#)

With the outbreak and ongoing uncertainty of the Coronavirus/COVID-19, we feel it is important to provide resources and ideas to ensure those who have communication challenges also get the information they need.

*Please download our aided language display (available at the end of this article) designed specifically to support these conversations. Please note that this is a general resource and may need to be personalised or modified to suit your child/person's vocabulary and/or layout of their system. You may need to reduce the number of items, program the vocabulary onto their device, or use partner assisted scanning rather than pointing. Please talk to your speech pathologist or AAC specialist if you have questions in relation to this process.*

### **Give the facts:**

The recommendations from experts is to buffer children from the ongoing news feed about Coronavirus, but it's also important to give them the facts at a level that suits their age and understanding.

With the changing face of the virus, we can't make a display that covers all of the facts. We suggest that you stay updated with credible news sites and use your child/person's system to talk about additional facts that are not on our display. For example, this might be a good time to explore countries of the world, and talk about them. If you



don't have them, maybe add them to your system or onto the places list if using PODD.

### **Talk about what you can do:**

“ Teaching kids what they can do to keep themselves and others safe is a positive way to make them feel empowered”

### [ABC News](#)

We've provided vocabulary to talk about the virus but more importantly, the recommendation from experts is to talk to your children about what you are doing to stay safe.

For example (words in **bold** are what you would model on your AAC system whilst speaking the whole phrase):

- **You** and **me** (we) **wash hands**
- **Stay away** from **sick** people
- Try **not** to **touch** our **face**
- **Stay home**
- **You** and **me** (we) have **supplies** if we need to **stay home**

- Go to **doctor** if **you** and **me** (we) get **sick**
- **Doctors** making **medicine** for **sick** people **soon**

## Check in and keep talking

Take an opportunity of time to talk about the virus with your child/person who uses AAC. By using the display provided and also their own system, you can help to show them the words they might need to use to ask questions or tell you things that they already know about it.

You might also model to them questions they might be thinking about.

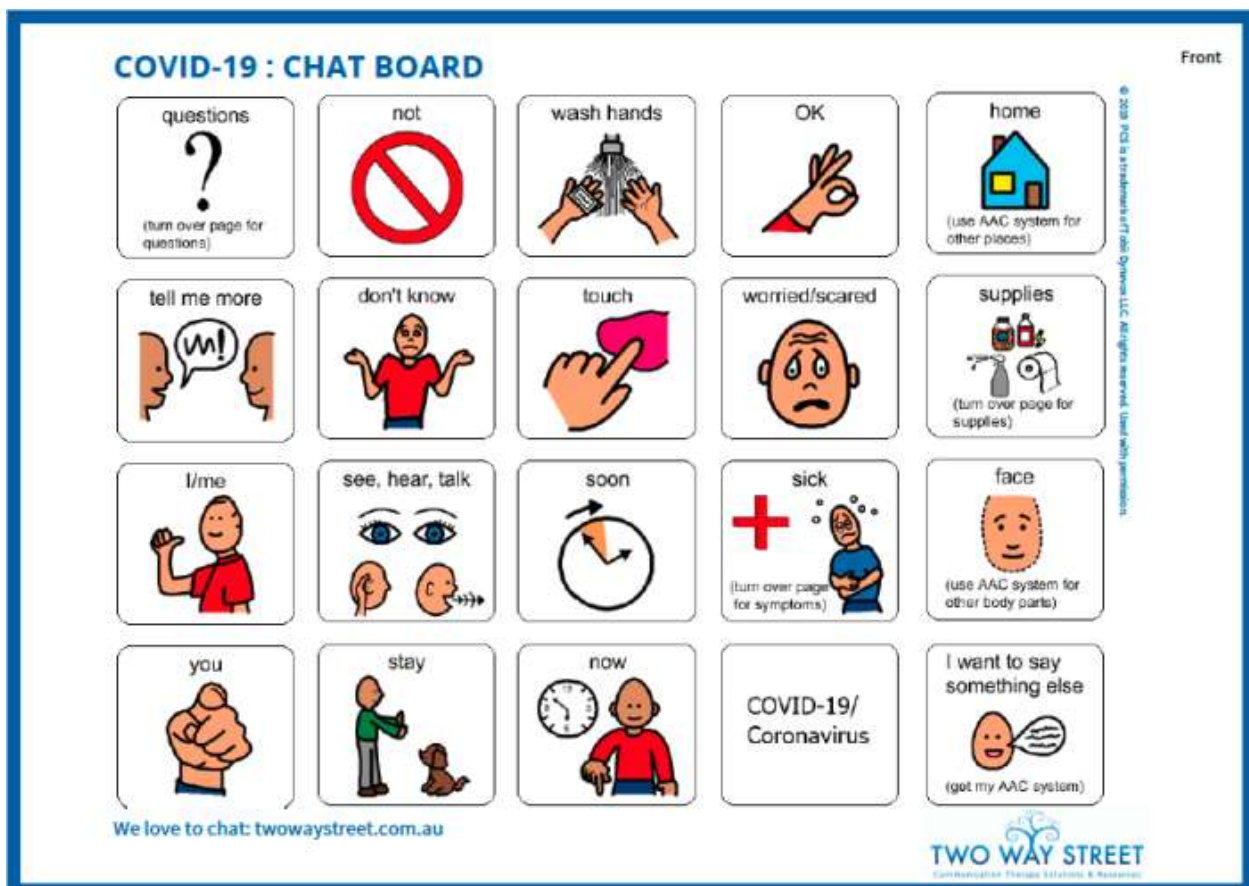
For example:

- **What** is **COVID-19**?
- **Who** gets **sick**?
- **How** do you get **sick/COVID-19**?
- **What can we do**?
- **What about (person)**? – If you think they might be worried about others.
- **What if you** and **me** (we) get **sick**?

It's not something you need to talk about constantly, but it is important to update when needed or check in occasionally. Remember, the intention is not to scare your child/person into panic,

but it is to acknowledge that they are likely hearing people talk about this virus. Maybe on the radio, people at school (students or staff), or within your home. Just because you are not talking to them, it doesn't mean they are not hearing things. The power and control for them (and for all of us) is in asking questions and talking about it.

Through conversation we learn more and gain the information we need to feel in control.



Aided language display for augmentative and alternative communication AAC to talk about Coronavirus or COVID-19

# Advice for caregivers of children with disabilities in the era of COVID-19



Psychologists' research offers ways to help families, caregivers and children cope during the pandemic.

Parents and caregivers of children and youth with disabilities<sup>1</sup> are facing unique challenges as a result of COVID-19. For example, while social distancing has been widely promoted as the best strategy to avoid transmission, that advice may not be realistic for people who care for children and youth with disabilities who may require therapy or assistance with daily tasks. Meanwhile, children's clinical services and other treatments are being disrupted with the closures of schools, medical settings and caregiving agencies. Families' ability to obtain critical medical supplies can become difficult as resources become scarce<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, while children overall seem to be less likely to show symptoms of COVID-19, those with disabilities may fall into the category of “high risk” due to secondary health conditions,<sup>3</sup> further adding to caregiver stress related to fears of infection and contagion. Should a child with a disability become sick or need medical care during the pandemic, many parents worry about rationing<sup>4</sup> of care and supplies as another threat to their child’s safety. Stressors like these intensify enacted or perceived experiences of stigma and discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

## Strategies to ease stressors

Research by psychologists points to several important ways parents and caregivers of children and youth with disabilities can cope with the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Communication is key

Stay informed, but don’t overdo media. While it is important to keep up to date on the rapidly changing information on COVID-19 in your community, the oversaturation of information can add to stress. To stay informed and keep your family up to date while remaining safe, identify a few trusted sources for accurate updates and limit social media.

Talk to your children and other family members about COVID-19. Choose a safe, comfortable place and time to openly discuss the reason for the changes to their lives. Social narratives, which draw on text and pictures to talk about situations and responses, can be a useful tool (links to social narratives on COVID-19 appear below). Remember, children may have difficulty expressing their feelings in words and sometimes anxiety, fear and frustration can be expressed through challenging behaviors. Other children may express these feelings through play. Answer their questions and assure them of the shared goal to keep everyone safe. Revisit the topic periodically to be sure they understand what’s happening around them.

Check-in with your child’s school, teachers and therapists about how educational and therapeutic service delivery may change in the coming weeks. If schools offer distance-learning opportunities to students without disabilities, the same support should be offered to students with disabilities. Don’t feel pressured to exactly replicate school and therapy at home. With flexibility, you may identify new ways to learn and grow together that would be more difficult in a typical time.

Check-in with your child's health-care provider by calling or using telehealth services if available. If your child has a chronic or acute medical condition, talking with the healthcare provider can guide decisions about how to access needed equipment, supplies, medications, etc., and whether it is best to visit a healthcare facility or stay at home.

## Prioritize self-care

Stay connected with others virtually. With many people needing to shelter in place, keep up social ties with others by planning regular times to call family and friends. Self-isolation, quarantine and shelter-in-place are only temporary ways of being. Email, texting, video chatting and social media also offer ways to engage. Seek support from those around you. For example, you might ask a friend to deliver food or medicine to your home.

Be kind to yourself. Since previously available respite options may no longer be available, focus on what can help you feel restored. This might mean taking short breaks from the immediate stress of the situation. This might mean spending some time watching animal videos to give yourself a brief mental break.

Seek help. Disability or condition-specific organizations and support groups can provide helpful information, social support and reduce feelings of stigma.<sup>6</sup> Reach out to local organizations to see if they offer virtual support groups or have active email listservs that send out information and resources.

Be prepared. While difficult to consider, establish a plan of care for your child and other family members should you become ill. Typical secondary caregivers may be unavailable. Determining your plan prior to needing it provides a sense of security and reassurance at a time fraught with uncertainty.

## Reassuring your child

Foster calm. In times of change, opportunities to engage in calming behaviors become especially important, so schedule coping and calming activities into a child's day and consider ways to introduce new calming behaviors.

Create routines. If previously established routines have been disrupted, create new routines for your child. This can help your child feel more secure and understand what is expected of them. This can also be an important way to introduce new behaviors — such as handwashing or behaviors in line with social distancing — into daily habits.

Be empathetic. Acknowledge that your child may not have their usual school or disability-related equipment, which may lead to added difficulties, discomfort or pain. Validate their feelings and try reaching out to therapists and other families in similar situations to brainstorm ideas to address any discomfort and/or sensory, communication, and movement challenges to the extent possible.

Show the love. Children with disabilities may internalize feelings that they and/or their care needs are burdensome to their parents. During this stressful and uncertain time in which parents may be wearing the hats of employee, teacher and caregiver, simultaneously, this feeling may be heightened. Remind your child of your unconditional love and joy of getting to spend extra time with them.

Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Children with disabilities often experience feelings of social isolation from their peers, and social distancing policies related to COVID-19 may amplify these feelings. Give your child opportunities discuss these feelings and brainstorm ways for your child to interact with others through texting, phone calls, and video chatting and other virtual platforms.

Research<sup>7</sup> suggests that the experience of raising a child with atypical development can foster strengths including flexibility in handling uncertainty, creative problem-solving and resilience. These strengths can be an asset when faced with new challenges such as COVID-19.