



## TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

Below is a summary, paraphrased to fit on one page, from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry on “How to Talk to Children about COVID-19.” To review the complete document, use this link: [https://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/Docs/latest\\_news/2020/Coronavirus\\_COVID19\\_Children.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/Docs/latest_news/2020/Coronavirus_COVID19_Children.pdf)

Clinicians, parents and teachers are faced with the challenge of discussing the evolving coronavirus outbreak with young children. Although these may be difficult conversations, they are also important. There are no right or wrong ways to talk with children about such public health emergencies. However, here are some suggestions you may find helpful:

1. Create an open and supportive environment where children know they can ask questions.
2. Answer questions honestly. Children will usually know, or eventually find out, if you’re making things up.
3. Use words and concepts children can understand. Gear your explanations to the child’s age, language and developmental level.
4. Help children find accurate and up-to-date information. Print out fact sheets from the CDC or WHO.
5. Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand.
6. Acknowledge and validate the child’s thoughts, feelings and reactions. Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.
7. Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety and the safety of immediate family members.
8. Be reassuring, but don’t make unrealistic promises. It’s fine to let children know that they’re safe in their house or in their school.
9. Let children know that there are lots of people helping those affected by the coronavirus outbreak.
10. Children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They will be very interested in how you respond to news about the coronavirus outbreak.
11. Don’t let children watch too much television with frightening images. The repetition of such scenes can be disturbing and confusing.
12. Children who have experienced serious illness or losses in the past are particularly vulnerable to prolonged or intense reactions to graphic news reports or images of illness or death. These children may need extra support and attention.
13. Children who are preoccupied with questions or concerns about the coronavirus outbreak may need be evaluated by a trained and qualified mental health professional.
14. Although parents and teachers may follow the news and the daily updates with interest and attention, most children just want to be children.