

# fact sheet

## SPEAKING TO YOUNG CHILDREN ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OUTBREAK



SELF-CARE TIP CV-19 Speaking\_25.3.2020

As a parent, it is our natural instinct to protect our children from scary news and the things that may cause them to worry about their safety, or their future. Children observe and listen to the world around them and us so intently, so it is important to manage your own worries and anxieties about COVID-19 first and foremost. They are taking it all in, especially how you are responding. You ultimately want to lay the groundwork for them to be able to come to you and talk about their feelings. So, trying to remain calm and open is a good start.

It can also be difficult to know how to respond, how much to share and how to answer their questions while also helping them feel safe. Answering questions honestly in an age appropriate way is the best option to help them. They appreciate honesty.

It is important to protect young children from exposure to the news, especially on TV, as the coverage is often graphic, sensationalised and confronting for them, as well as often being inaccurate. Maybe access just once a day updates and limit it to when your children are in bed. Constant updates will only increase yours and their anxiety levels. If you do watch TV, watch it WITH them so you can discuss afterwards.

Below are some tips to support you as you navigate speaking to your children about the COVID-19 outbreak:

- Help them to feel comfortable sharing by dedicating some time and space to have a conversation outside of busy times, in a relatively private space in a calm and hopeful way
- Ask them gently what they already know and understand, so that you can get a sense of what they have been exposed to and potential questions and correct any misunderstandings
- Listen, and validate their feelings. Anxiety is real for all involved right now and with some understanding and reassurance from you their anxiety will lessen
- Let them know anxiety is a normal response to getting sick but that most people are recovering well
- Suggest they have regular contact with those they might be worried about via **Zoom/Skype**/or phone call eg: grandparents
- Discuss any reflections they have had or any "facts" they may have heard and use this time to share worries and reassure, try not to overwhelm them with unnecessary information eg death rates
- Also adjust your body language to further reflect this sense of calm and open-ness
- Be hopeful and explain that the world has at times gone through other stresses and that recovery is possible. Use play eg: dolls/houses/drawings to help them understand
- Use this conversation as a learning experience, perhaps talk them through the role of viruses and some of the science in age appropriate ways
- An app or mindfulness practice at night can help children who are feeling anxious. The **Insight Timer** (<https://insighttimer.com>) app has a wide variety of meditations for children
- Utilise this opportunity to focus on kindness, share with your children some of the ways that you can as a family look out for vulnerable family members, neighbours and friends
- Help them see there are things they can do that are in their control to help keep them safe, eg: hand washing and physical distancing, empower them to think of these things as their contribution to slowing the spread of the virus and helping others
- Offer your reassurance and a reminder of the power of thinking in each moment, put things into perspective and remind them that by staying at home you are keeping yourselves safe as well as others
- Look for the helpers, show your children some examples of those in the community who are stepping up and helping others when they are needed most
- Let your children know that you are their safe space, they can approach you anytime with any questions they have, and you will always answer them as honestly as you can
- Check in with yourself often, the way that you are carrying your own anxiety and worries about the global outbreak can be felt by your children too. Look after each other. 🌸



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[gidgetfoundation.org.au](https://gidgetfoundation.org.au) | 1300 851 758  
[contact@gidgetfoundation.org.au](mailto:contact@gidgetfoundation.org.au)

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