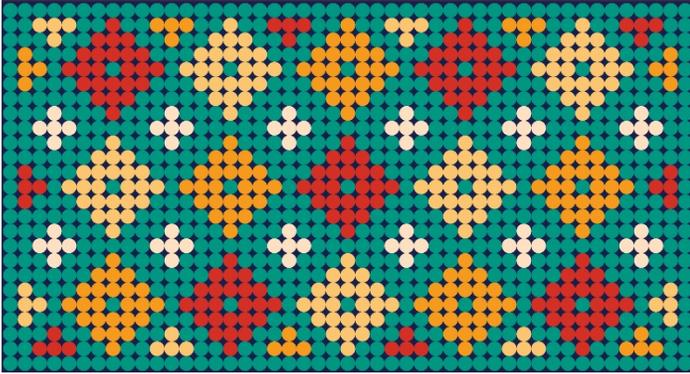


COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus)

Talking with Children About Coronavirus



During this time, children may have questions or concerns about coronavirus (COVID-19). They have probably heard you and others talk about it. This may have made them feel frustrated, anxious, or scared. The best thing to do is to support them and share information that is helpful and accurate.

Here are some things to keep in mind when talking with them.

How do I explain COVID-19?

Coronavirus is a new virus that causes a disease called COVID-19. A virus is a type of germ. Most people who have gotten sick, like children, have had mild symptoms like fever, runny nose, or cough.¹ When appropriate, you can share that some people might still be sick but not have any symptoms.^{1,2} Elders and people who already have health issues are more likely to get sicker.³

Reassure them that adults around them—their relatives, doctors, and teachers—are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.^{4,5} Let them know that as Native people, our traditional values of caring for each other and our community will help us make good choices during this time.

How do I create a safe space when talking with them?

Start by asking open-ended questions—broad questions that do not just get a “yes” or “no” answer—to see what they know.⁶

- “What have you heard about a new sickness that has been going around?”
- “How have you been feeling lately?”

Find activities like drawing, stories, or singing to help open the conversation.⁶ Give them a space to explore, process, and talk.

Try not to minimize or avoid their fears or concerns. Listen with an open heart and validate that their feelings are normal.^{6,7}

Stay calm; children can pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues.^{1,4}

Keep information age-appropriate, honest, and accurate.^{1,4}

Watch their body language for signs of anxiety.^{5,6} Signs include crankiness, clinginess, trouble sleeping, and distraction.⁵

Wrap up conversations in a good way.⁶ Say a prayer, smudge, sing, or do an activity of their choice.

Let them know that they can come to you with any questions.^{1,4}

What can they do to stay safe?

Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (sing the ABCs) often.^{1,2} Make sure to get between the fingers, under the nails, and up the wrists. Wash after using the bathroom and being in public places like the playground or bus.

- Avoid touching the face, including nose picking, rubbing the mouth, and rubbing the eyes.²

Stay at least six feet away from others that do not live with them.² Each person has their own personal bubble or space that needs to be respected.

- Skip having friends over for birthdays or other social events.
- Have a video chat party or a phone call instead.

Wear a cloth face mask—covering their nose and mouth—in public and around people they do not live with.² Have them pick out their favorite mask or fabric to make their own.⁸ They do not have to wear a mask if they are younger than 2 years old, have trouble breathing, are unconscious, or are unable to remove the mask by themselves.⁹

Cover sneezes and coughs with their elbow or a tissue.²

Tell an adult if they are feeling sick. For caregivers, schedule a COVID-19 testing appointment with your healthcare provider or health department if they have any symptoms.¹

- Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, fatigue, diarrhea, runny nose, body aches, sore throat, or trouble breathing.³
- Stay home and away from others as much as possible, except for seeking medical care.^{4,10}

How do I explain social distancing?

Let them know that the virus is mainly spread from person-to-person, so staying at least six feet away from others while wearing a mask will make it harder for the virus to spread.⁴ This will help keep their loved ones and other people from getting sick. Make sure to tell them that this is temporary.⁴ Their friends are all trying to keep their distance too. When things get better, they will get to be around their friends again.

How do I talk to them about going back to school?

There is a lot of uncertainty with schools reopening. Each school district is different and will have their own precautions to keep them and their teachers safe. Find out which options your child's school is offering. School might be in-person, online, or a combination. Try to stay informed about your school district's updates as things change. They may share information via phone, email, website, or social media.

How can I help them cope?

Maintain as normal a routine as possible.⁴

- Have consistent times for snacks, schoolwork, play, physical activity, and bed.

Create opportunities to play and relax when possible.⁶

Reduce screen time on COVID-19 to ease anxiety.⁶

Find activities that could cheer others up like writing letters or sending care packages to relatives, elders, or healthcare workers.

Share family stories or read a book on the strength and resilience of our ancestors who lived through hard things like this. Here are a few good books you could read.

- Crazy Horse by Joseph Bruchac
- Jingle Dancer by Cynthia Leitich Smith
- SkySisters by Jan Bourdeau Waboose

Make sure to take good care of yourself.⁶ Take time to breathe and be gentle with yourself. You are trying your best. To take care of others, we must first take care of ourselves.

How can I ensure they do not spread stigma or false information?

Pay attention to what they see or hear from others, including the media. Identify any false information that they say.⁵ Share that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, nationality, or language.⁷ Remember that children often copy behaviors around them, so try to set a good example, like supporting or showing concern for others.⁵ Avoid blaming others or making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.^{1,4,6} Finally, remind them that if they hear or see bullying, they can tell a trusted adult.⁶

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