

# REASSURING YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19



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### INTRODUCTION

Every year thousands of people worldwide contract a virus of one form or another. This year there is a virus called COVID-19, which infects the lungs and is causing global concern because of how quickly and easily it spreads. The reality is that the health risk for young and healthy people is low and so we don't want our children to feel helpless and overwhelmed. Instead, we want to provide them with factual and age-appropriate information so that they are empowered to look after their own health and well-being.

## 2

### WHAT MESSAGE ARE YOU SENDING?

Parents and teachers can help children manage their emotions during stressful times. If adults seem overly worried, children's anxiety is likely to rise. Adults should acknowledge a level of concern (without panicking) and model actions that reduce the risk of the illness.

#### Remain Calm and Reassuring

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.
- Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help keep their concerns in perspective.

#### Avoid Blame

- Avoid stereotyping any one group as responsible for the virus.
- Deal with any bullying or negative comments made toward others.

#### Monitor Television and Social Media

- Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media when your children are present - it might be upsetting.

- Speak to your child about how COVID-19 stories on the Internet could be based on rumors and inaccuracies.
- Use factual information to talk about the disease - this can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety and should be avoided.
- As an alternative, engage your child in games or other interesting activities.
- Be aware that information designed for adults, rather than children can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

#### Maintain a Routine as Much as Possible

- A regular schedule can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Encourage your children to keep up with schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push if they seem overwhelmed.

#### Be Honest and Accurate

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.
- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain the current status of COVID-19 based on updates from the Health Unit.
- Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact - especially when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It is also known that it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to wash your hands regularly with soap and water.



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### TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19

You know your children best. Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears and questions.

#### **Follow Their Lead**

Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health.

Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

Make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves.

#### **Primary Aged Children**

- Provide brief and simple information
- Balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe.
- Tell them that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick.
- Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands.
- Use language such as “adults are taking steps to keep you safe.”

#### **Junior Aged Children**

- Older children may be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community.
- They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy.
- Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.

#### **Intermediate and High School Aged Children**

- Older children are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion.
- You may be able refer directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts.
- Continue to provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19, which will help them feel a sense of control.

## 4

### MORE INFORMATION

Information is rapidly changing about COVID-19 - stay informed by accessing the following websites:

- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit: [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org)
- Ontario Ministry of Health: [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

*Information in this resource was adapted from information by National Association of School Psychologists (NASP\*) [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org) and the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.*