TALKING TO YOUR CHILD DURING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Minister's message

Your kids, like mine, will have many questions about Coronavirus and what it means for them – and for the people they love.

I know it can be daunting for parents and carers to answer those questions. That's why, in close consultation with our child psychologist team, we've developed a resource to help guide you through these conversations.

Everyone's child is different, and some will want to talk more than others. What's most important is that you're there for them when they're ready to talk.

Without doubt, we face an enormous challenge.

But I want you to know that as parents, caregivers and Victorians, we are in this together.

The Hon James Merlino, MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education

This guide will help you talk to your child about coronavirus (COVID-19). It includes tips on how to have a safe and reassuring conversation and links to resources to help you and your family.

Essential actions

- **Don't be afraid to discuss coronavirus (COVID-19) with your children**

- **Be guided by your child**

- **Stick to a routine**

- **Close conversations with care**

- **Remember to look after yourself**

Don't be afraid to discuss coronavirus (COVID-19) with your children

- Most children will have already heard about coronavirus and parents and carers should take the opportunity to talk to them about the current situation.

- Honest and regular communication is key. Not talking about something can make children worry more.

- Children often rely on their friends and social media for the news. Parents and carers can help by positioning themselves as a trusted source for information and as a person who can help children with their questions.

Adapt information depending on your child's age

- Try to remain calm and positive when talking to your child.
- Think about your child's age. Offer information using language and examples they will understand.
- It's okay if you can't answer everything – and to say you're not sure. Use this as an opportunity to find out information together. Being available to your child is what matters.
- Be careful not to share too much information all at once, as this may be overwhelming.
- Avoid talking in a way that could make your child feel more worried.

Be guided by your child

- Ask your child to tell you anything they may have heard about coronavirus (COVID-19), and how they feel about this situation.
- Check in with your child regularly. Give them opportunities to ask you questions over the coming weeks and months.
- Some children will worry more about others than themselves. Find ways for them to connect with family and friends as much as possible using technology.
- Be reassuring. Tell children that the changes in their life have been introduced to make us all safer. Tell them, that eventually, things will go back to normal.
- Be aware of the language you use with your child while you are around them. Remember that children will be listening to adult conversations more than usual.
- Don't dismiss your child's fears. It is understandable for them to be concerned because they have probably never experienced anything like this before.
- Tell your child that doctors and scientists all around the world are working really hard to learn more about coronavirus (COVID-19) and to keep us safe.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe

- Give them some control over what is happening. Teach the importance of physical distancing, hand washing and how to do these things properly. Remind them of their responsibility to protect others from coughs and sneezing.
- Remind them to call 000 if they or their family are unsafe.

Stick to a routine

- Over the school holidays, structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are still an important part of keeping children happy and healthy.
- Where you can, have a daily routine. Create a shared timetable with your family and put it up on the fridge where everyone can see.
- If possible, find a time every day to talk about the importance of good hygiene an teach them the essentials of practicing physical distancing.
- Include things like outside time, play time, free time on technology, creative time and learning time.
- It is okay to be flexible and respond to the needs and emotional state of your child.

Keep talking

- Find out what your child already knows or is worried about. It's important to find out if they have heard incorrect information.
- Ask questions that don't have yes or no answers.
- If your child asks you something and you don't know the answer, say so. Use the question as a chance to find out together.
- If your children don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's okay.
- Let them know that we are all going to keep listening and talking.

Close conversations with care

- It's important not to leave children feeling worried after a conversation.
- When you wrap up your conversations, look for signs they are feeling anxious. This might be a change in their tone of voice, their breathing or body language.
- Comfort them if they feel this way.

Things to look out for in your children

It is normal for children and young people to show signs of distress. Common reactions include:

- fear and anxiety
- anger and frustration
- confusion
- sadness
- denial.

Remember to look after yourself

- This situation can be stressful – regardless of your age. To look after the people you love, you also need to look after yourself.
- If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before having a conversation or answering your child's questions.
- If you are feeling worried, tell your child that you will find some information and talk to them soon.
- The following external resources are also available to support your mental health and wellbeing:
  - **Headspace –** for family and friends
  - **Beyondblue –** COVID19
  - **Lifeline –** Mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak

Additional resources

To support you when talking to your child

- **Raising Children Network –** Coronavirus (COVID-19) and children in Australia
- **Emerging Minds –** supporting children during the coronavirus outbreak
- **KidsHealth –** Coronavirus (COVID-19): How to Talk to Your Child
- **eSafety Office –** COVID-19: an online safety kit for parents and carers

To share with children and young people

- **headspace –** how to cope with stress related to Novel Coronavirus
- **ReachOut –** coping during the coronavirus

For up-to-date information and advice on coronavirus (COVID-19), visit:

- DET coronavirus website
- DHHS coronavirus website