

Guidance for Parents and Families during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Talking to Kids about Coronavirus

This is a difficult time for everyone! Even as parents, we have a hard time understanding what is occurring in our nation and others, making the task of explaining this to our children even more challenging. Here are some tips when answering questions and giving children information regarding COVID-19:

- It is most important to remain calm and reassuring! Remember, children react to and follow parent's reactions. We are their biggest resource! Create an open and supportive environment where children know that they can ask questions and allow them to openly express their feelings.
- Recognize and value your own mental health!
- Start the conversation by asking kids what they already know or have heard about the virus! This will help to guide you with what information you can provide and give you a chance to assess your child's initial worries or anxiety.
- Honesty is key! We know the impact of peers and the media, so make sure that you are answering questions honestly and at a level that matches your child's understanding.
- Acknowledge and validate your child's thoughts, feelings and reactions as they occur. Children need to hear that they are allowed to feel worried or scared, and that you understand how they are feeling and can help them through it.
- Above all, make sure that they know that you and other adults are making decisions that are meant to keep them safe and healthy! Of course, emphasizing good hygiene is always important, especially now! There is a section on hygiene below.

The following comic was provided by NPR and is a great resource to explain COVID-19 in a way that will make sense to your kids! You can also print this comic out so it is more readily available.

https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?ck_subscriber_id=645222162

Review and model basic hygiene practices

We should always strive to teach our children proper hygiene practices, but sometimes this is easier said than done! Again, this will be important to teach in terms of simple steps to prevent the spread of germs.

· Washing hands! We can turn this into a fun thing for kids. For example, give them a song to sing while washing their hands like “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or singing “Happy Birthday” twice. Ultimately, hand washing should continue for **20 seconds**.

- Hand-washing should occur:

- § Before AND after meals

- § After coming in from outside

- § After blowing their nose or putting their hands in their mouth

- Here is a quick video that demonstrates the importance hand-washing through a cool experiment! You can even do this with your kids at home!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7ryO6E7ZUw>

· Other healthy practices for adults to engage in and also to emphasize when talking to children:

- Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue

- Avoid touching your face – this includes eyes, nose, and mouth

- Try not to share food or drink!

- To prevent the spread of germs, consider fist bumps or elbow bumps instead of handshakes or high-fives

- Use hand sanitizer if soap is not available (the CDC recommends sanitizer that is 60-95% alcohol). This should be supervised and not recommended for kids under age 2!

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects using anti-bacterial wipes or cleaning sprays

Other healthy habits to promote wellness (for parents and kids)

Sleep is a foundational component of physical and mental health for everyone in the home, so sticking to a healthy sleep schedule is extra important in this stressful time. The American Academy of Pediatrics has provided the following guidelines for children:

- Infants 4 months to 12 months should sleep 12 to 16 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children 1 to 2 years of age should sleep 11 to 14 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children 3 to 5 years of age should sleep 10 to 13 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children 6 to 12 years of age should sleep 9 to 12 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Teenagers 13 to 18 years of age should sleep 8 to 10 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.

Tips to Promote Healthy Sleep for Children

- Have a set bedtime for each child
- Initiate a 'wind-down' routine 30 minutes before bedtime that includes quiet and soothing activities such as a bath or shower, reading, listening to music
- For young children the bedtime routine is a great time for caregivers to connect with their children and give them some undivided attention
- Avoid any screen time or vigorous activity in the hour before bedtime
- Avoid exposure to any anxiety-producing content (news, adult conversations) in the hour before bedtime

Maintaining healthy eating habits is another key part of promoting wellness within your family.

- Routine: Even though your days may look very different, it is important to keep a routine around when meals happen during the day. This provides kids with predictability and can help to limit over-snacking.
- Family meals: This provides a time for family members to connect and for parents to model healthy eating. Limit distractions during family meals by putting all electronics in a basket before sitting down to eat.
- Choosing healthy foods: Keep fruits and vegetables accessible for snacks. If your local grocery is low in stock, check-out a local farm or produce stand. KidsHealth from Nemours recommends serving lean meats, whole-grain breads and cereals, and limiting fat intake and sugary drinks.
- Get kids involved: Teach them how to make healthy choices and create a balanced meal. Have them join you in the kitchen and let them assist with making the meal.

Keep the body moving - physical activity is important!

Current American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines call for all children over age 1 to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Following this guideline will not only benefit your child's physical health, but likely reduce everyone's stress level and help the days go more smoothly. Below are some ideas for getting safe physical activity.

Going outside safely:

- Take a hike! Make sure to avoid crowded areas and keep a 6ft distance between you and other people on the trails [Trails in Lancaster County](#)
- Walk in your neighborhood and play eye-spy or create a [visual scavenger hunt](#) (avoid clues that require interacting with other people)
- Set up an obstacle course in your backyard
- Sidewalk chalk: <https://whatmomslove.com/kids/sidewalk-chalk-ideas/>
- Stargaze at night
- Paint rocks
- Have lunch outside

Staying active indoors:

- Do some guided yoga [Cosmic Kids yoga](#)
- Have a dance party or play freeze dance
- Sing active songs: Baby Shark, Head Shoulders Knees and Toes, Elmo Slide, Going on a Bear Hunt, Row, Row, Row Your Boat, find many more on youtube
- Play the old classics: hide and seek, red light/green light, mother may I, simon says

Below are some additional ideas for activities, including mindfulness-based activities, that children can engage in at home. Parents can join in too!

Art Activities

- The Craft Factory in Mount Joy is posting a new at home craft/art idea every day. Kids can post pics of them completing it and be entered to win a prize. The first was chalk drawings, yesterday was building forts and today is painting. It is on their FB page
- Art club for kids – learn to draw - <https://www.youtube.com/user/ArtforKidsHub>

Mindfulness

- Power Down: Robot relaxation for kids:
<https://www.littlefloweryoga.com/blog/robot-relaxation-for-kids/>
- How to make a glitter jar:
<https://www.littlefloweryoga.com/blog/4-easy-steps-to-make-a-glitter-jar/>

Indoor Activities

- The best ideas for kids: Indoor activities:
<https://www.thebestideasforkids.com/indoor-activities-for-kids/>
- 20 virtual field trips to museums:
<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/national-gallery-of-art-washington-dc?hl=en>

- Online Readers: Free literacy program where actors read:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/StorylineOnline>
- No time for flashcards:
<https://www.notimeforflashcards.com/2012/03/50-simple-outdoor-activities-for-kids.html>
- Break out all the old card games and board games that have been sitting in your closet!
- Bake or cook something new together

Sensory Activities

These are fun for all, and will be a great aid in providing an activity that replaces excessive screentime and helps promote development! <https://jojobi.com/50-easy-sensory-activities/>

How to Structure the Day

Keeping a regular schedule throughout this stressful time can be reassuring in addition to promoting physical health! Below are some tips for establishing a routine that will work for everyone.

Morning/Family Meeting: pick a time where the whole family can sit together, even if it's just for 15 minutes. Ask that everyone be dressed and have eaten breakfast by this meeting time. For adolescents you may want to have this meeting at the end of the day and use it to preview the following day. Use this meeting to:

- Check in on how everyone is feeling
- Review the schedule for the day and also let your kids suggest food or activities they would like. Remind them of their chores or responsibilities
- Give your kids some undivided attention and complete an activity together such as reading a book, singing songs, having a silly dance party

Daily Routine: Kids thrive on predictability and consistency. If your kid usually attends daycare or school, they are used to structure. For this reason, it's a good idea to have a general daily schedule that includes elements such as:

- Meal times
- Nap or quiet times
- Educational or structured activity times
- Outdoors/active play times
- Chores
- Family meeting or family activity times
- Screen time

Sample schedule for preschool-aged children:

Wake-up - 9am: breakfast, get dressed, free play

9am: Morning meeting

9:30am: Indoor activity (see below for ideas)

10:30am: Outside/active time

11:30am: Wash hands and prep lunch

12pm: Lunch

12:30pm: Nap/quiet time

2:30pm: Indoor activity

3:30pm: Outside/active time

4:30pm: Chores/clean up

5pm: Screen time

If there are multiple caregivers in the home, this is also an opportunity to assign 'shifts' and be clear about who is in charge of the kids throughout the day. Adults in the home will likely need time to step back from child care to either do some work, take care of responsibilities around the house, or practice self care. You can avoid confusion and tension by communicating clearly about this ahead of time.

You may be feeling overwhelmed and experiencing your anxiety about this adjustment. And so it is important to recognize your own mental health needs as well. Take time out of your morning, before the kids rise, and engage in a coping strategy (yoga, mindfulness, deep breathing, journaling, reading, etc.) that will help you to feel centered and ready to tackle the day. Remember you need to properly care for yourself before being able to be fully present for your kids.

Continuing Education/Learning even while school is out!

Continuing education when able, even though kids are out of school, will help prevent learning loss and possibly inspire a greater desire to learn. Learning can be fun! Many websites provide free resources for parents and children to provide continued learning and keep children's brains working. For example:

[Scholastic Learn at Home Resources](#)

Interactive themed daily lessons including read-alouds and games from preschool through elementary

[PBS Kids Resources](#)

Educational videos and games on a variety of topics

[National Geographic for Kids](#)

Educational videos and games on nature-themed topics

[BBC \(learning with a British twist!\)](#)

School doesn't just include learning. Another important part of school is social interaction. During this time, kids are not able to be around their peers. Again, it is important to remind and reassure them that even though it is frustrating, not allowing them to have physical playdates is for their own safety! Even with social distancing, parents can still facilitate social connection for their kids by setting up digital playdates through FaceTime or other digital video platforms. If you don't have video capabilities, encourage your child to have a conversation over the phone. Texting is great, but hearing someone's voice can be reassuring - in the sense that everyone is dealing with the same frustrations right now! It will allow your children to connect with friends while being safe, and provide them with the ability to see and hear directly from their peers and know that they are OK! In addition, bringing back letter writing to friends and family members is a way for your kids to connect with others as well as continue to work on their writing skills.

If you're still searching for more, check the image below for more fun, educational sites!

FREE EDUCATIONAL SITES

SCHOLASTIC LEARN AT HOME Google "Scholastic Learn at Home" for quick access	LEARNING A-Z learninga-z.com
PBS LEARNING MEDIA nj.pbslearningmedia.org	BRAINPOP brainpop.com
NAT GEO 4 KIDS kids.nationalgeographic.com	VOOKS vooks.com/teacher-appreciation
ABCYA abcya.com	PHONICS HERO phonicshero.com
FUN BRAIN funbrain.com	DREAMSCAPE squigglepark.com/dreamscape
STARFALL starfall.com	SWITCHEROO ZOO switcheroozoo.com
HIGHLIGHTS KIDS highlightskids.com	BOOM LEARNING wow.boomlearning.com
STORYLINE ONLINE storylineonline.net	KIDS DISCOVER online.kidsdiscover.com
ABC MOUSE abcmouse.com	TIME FOR KIDS timeforkids.com
WONDEROPOLIS wonderopolis.org	GONOODLE gonoodle.com
