

## Talking to children about Coronavirus

Children are hearing about Coronavirus and we all want to make sure they get reliable information and hear about the virus in a supportive environment from a trusted adult.

This information sheet suggests some ideas to help

### Find Out What Your Child Already Knows

**Ask questions geared to your child's age level.** For older children, you might ask, "Are people in school talking about coronavirus? What are they saying?" For younger children, you could say, "Have you heard grownups talking about a new illness that's going around?" This gives you a chance to learn how much children know — and to find out if they're hearing the wrong information.

**Follow your child's lead.** Some children may want to spend time talking. But if your children don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's OK.

### Offer Comfort — and Honesty

**Focus on helping your child feel safe, but be truthful.** Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in.

**If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, say so.** Use the question as a chance to find out together. Check the Government help page for up-to-date, reliable information about coronavirus (COVID-19). That way, you have the facts and children don't see headlines about deaths and other frightening information.

**Speak calmly and reassuringly.** Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have a cold or the flu.. children pick up on it when parents worry. So when you talk about coronavirus and the news, use a calm voice and try not to seem upset.

**Give children space to share their fears.** It's natural for children to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let your child know that children don't seem to get as ill as adults. Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them.

**Know when they need guidance.** Be aware of how your children get news and information, especially older children who go online. Point them to age-appropriate content so they don't end up finding news that scares them or has incorrect information.

### Help children Feel in Control

**Give your child specific things they can do to feel in control.** Teach children that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often, can help them stay well. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading to others. Be a good role model and let your children see you washing your hands often!

**Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy.** Young children might be reassured to know that hospitals and doctors are prepared to treat people who get sick. Older children might be comforted to know that scientists are working to develop a vaccine. These talks also prepare children for changes in their normal routine if schools or childcare settings close in the future.

**Put news stories in context.** If they ask, explain that death from the virus is still rare, despite what they might hear. Watch age appropriate news coverage e.g. BBC Newsround or Blue Peter etc. so you can filter what they hear.

**Children often worry more about family and friends than themselves.** For example, if children hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Letting them call or Skype with older relatives can help them feel reassured about loved ones.

**Let your children know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times.** Everyone does. Recognising these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience.

### Keep the Conversation Going

**Keep checking in with your child.** Use talking about coronavirus as a way to help children learn about their bodies, like how the immune system fights off disease.

**Talk about current events with your children often.** It's important to help them think through stories they hear about. Ask questions: What do you think about these events? How do you think these things happen? Such questions also encourage conversation about non-news topics.