COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN
DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

A kit for caregivers and families

This kit has been created with the intention of being distributed to families, parents, and guardians of children. The included documents, guidelines and resources focus on promoting healthy and comforting discussions between children and their parents/guardians during this stressful time. Materials focused on how to answer children's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) questions are provided, along with guidance for age appropriate discussions. Furthermore, resources for activities and educational material to use at home are included. There are also links to websites to support parent/guardian COVID-19 discussions with their children.

The documents included in this kit are intended to help alleviate some of the anxiety and stress parents/guardians are feeling as they strive to comfort frightened children as well as oversee their education at home for the time being.

Please distribute these materials to families, parents and guardians in your community as you see fit.

Documents included:

1. Introduction/ Resources for caregivers and families
2. Starting the conversation
3. Anticipated questions from children about COVID-19
4. Helping kids cope with stress and worry / Creating a safe and nurturing home
5. Activities to try while staying home
6. Comic book activity

SEOC TA 8192721 03/20/2020

RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS & FAMILIES

Parenting during the outbreak

- https://zerotothrive.org/covid-19/
- https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/02292020_NASP_NASN_COVID-19_parent_handout.pdf
- https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/
- https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids
- https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.htm
- https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/little-house-calls/202003/parenting-during-covid-19
- htps://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare.children.html

Coronavirus – video explanation for kids

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVvVTDhGqaA

Handwashing for kids

- https://www.scrubclub.org/index.php
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBGsoimPXZg

Digital activities for kids

- https://www.nasa.gov/kidsclub/index.html
- https://www.gonoodle.com/for-families/

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

- https://www.facebook.com/NationalFederationHomeResources/
  Resources for caregivers with children at home for prolonged periods of time. Fun ideas, crafts and educational resources.
- https://www.pinterest.com/nffcmh/
  Family activities and parenting tips on topics such as emotions, mindfulness and stress.

Coping with Stress

- https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/coronavirus-anxiety.htm

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Don't be afraid to discuss COVID-19 with your children. Children may worry more if they are not included in the discussion. Help children feel informed with developmentally appropriate, fact-based information.

1. Visit the state website, Michigan.gov/Coronavirus to find accurate, timely information and review the anticipated questions.

2. Take time to process the information, then provide it to your child. Your child will be better able to handle the news if you deliver information in a calm and clear manner.

3. Start the conversation somewhere you are both comfortable, without distractions.

During your conversation, remember to:

- Allow your child to ask questions. Try to answer your child's questions honestly and clearly. It is okay if you don't know all the answers, just be available to your child.
- Show your child patience. Listen to your child's fears, but don't dwell in frightening fantasies.
- Keep the conversation open. Reassure your child that if you don't have the answer to their question, that you will try to find the answer.
- Remind your child you are here for them, you love them, and that their emotions are normal to feel right now.

Talking is only the first step. Empower your child to be part of the effort to stay healthy, and reassure them of all the ways you are keeping them safe. Let your child know there are many people working hard to keep everyone safe, and this will pass with time.

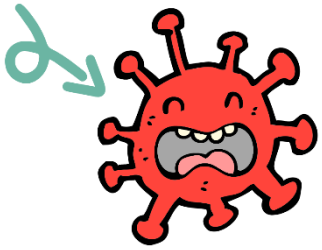
Talking to kids about stressful topics, like COVID-19, can be tricky. Use this guide to help identify your child's communication needs and goals. **Communication Needs** are largely determined by a child's development and emotional maturity and become more complex as they age. **Communication Goals** aim to guide the types of conversations that parents can have with their children to alleviate fear while ensuring the child receives reassurance and support. This promotes open dialogue, to encourage healthy conversations and trust.

	Communication Needs	**Communication Goals**
Infants and Toddlers	• To feel loved and safe • To know their emotions and fears are normal • Routines and comfort	• Nurturing and comforting • Reading and singing together • Maintain routines • Interactive play
Elementary	• To feel loved and safe • To know their emotions and fears are normal • To have their feelings and worries understood and respected • Routines and comfort • To learn what they can do to be healthy and safe	• Limit the amount of information; preserve their innocence and limit fears • Filter the news you provide • Calm tone, listen to their fears, answer their questions • Clearing up rumors with facts • Emphasize all the ways you are keeping them safe • Educate about handwashing, cough and sneeze hygiene, cleaning
Middle – High School	• To feel loved and safe • To know their emotions and fears are normal • To be informed and guided into adult life and conversations when ready • To have strong, positive role models and moral standards • To have recognition and respect of their opinions and ideas • To be heard • To learn what they can do to be healthy and safe • To learn what they can do to help others stay healthy and safe	• Open discussions; listen to their questions and fears • Screen the media/news; watch together and discuss • Limit unsupervised screen time, and constant bombarding of scary news • Calm tone, listen to their fears, answer their questions • Clearing up rumors with facts • Educate about handwashing, cough and sneeze hygiene, cleaning • Reassure them about their safety and health • Educating about the principle of social distancing for their safety and that of others (grandparents, neighbors etc.) • Encourage them to create activities while at home

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS

When talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), some of these questions may come up. Included are some suggestions for how to answer your child, as well as comfort them if they are feeling scared.

This is a germ.



What is the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

This is a germ (virus) that can pass in tiny droplets from one person to another – especially when they cough or sneeze. The virus can make us feel sick, like when you get a cold.

What happens when you get Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Most people have feelings like other colds: cough, fever, chills. But some people can get sicker than others. Children are not getting very sick like some other people.

What can we do to be safe?

We can keep ourselves healthy and clean by washing our hands A LOT. Also, we can help protect our family and friends by staying home more, so we don't spread the virus around to lots of people.

If we stay away from big crowds the virus doesn't have an easy way to spread from person to person. This is why schools are closed for a few weeks and we aren't going to busy places like the mall, movie theatre, or library.

We should cover all our coughs and sneezes then wash our hands right away.

What is the best way to wash my hands?

Always wash hands with warm water and soap, scrubbing all the nooks and crannies. If you sing Happy Birthday 2 times and really scrub, it gets rid of the most germs.
Good times to wash up:

- Before and after eating
- After sneezes and coughs
- Anytime you touch your face
- Anytime you use the bathroom
- After being in public places
- After playing with pets
- Before bed

Wash your hands to get rid of germs.

Not like this! His cough is not covered.

What about sneezes and coughs?

Cough or sneeze into a tissue and throw it away! Then wash your hands! If there are no tissues, you can cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow, then go wash up!

Is it ok to feel scared or nervous?

- It is absolutely ok to feel nervous or scared about this illness. Many people are talking about it right now because they are trying to find ways to keep people safe, and healthy. By talking about it, we learn more, and by learning we find new ways to stay healthy and protect others.
- Always ask questions if you have them. If we don't have answers, we will find out for you.

But, I will miss my friends and I want to see family!

- If you are missing your friends or family, you can ask your parent about using video-calls or talking on the phone.
- Maybe taking photos of things you are doing at home, and sharing with your friends and family would be fun?
- Start a journal to write new ideas in or explain an activity you did today.
- If the weather cooperates, try to get outside for some exercise and play.

CREATING A SAFE & NURTURING HOME

Creating a secure home environment is important so that you and your children can cope with stress and uncertainty in a healthy way – especially during times of stress.

Here is what caregivers can do:

- Be predictable and consistent
- Be responsive
- Be nurturing and affectionate
- Model calm reassurance and thoughtful problem solving

Routines are important for ALL children and adolescents.

Routines build psychological safety. Create a daily routine for predictability.

- Wake and sleep times
- Eating times
- Schoolwork time
- Playtime
- Electronic time (and Screen-free and news-free time)

Make the routine visible for the next day's schedule prior to bedtime.

Too much news information can be overwhelming.

Designate times where children are not around news/media/COVID-19 discussions. The appropriate amount of information depends on the age of the child. Young children should only have a small amount of information. For older children, no more than 20 minutes of reading or watching news per day. Set aside time to watch the news with your child so you can have discussion as their concerns or questions arise.

Promising children what we cannot control creates distrust.

Promises most often make adults, not children feel better. Unfortunately, we can't answer many questions now, such as "When will I go back to school?" and "Will I get sick?". You can reassure with responses such as "I don't know about school yet", "I am here to take care of you", and " I will share more information and answers to your questions as soon as I have them".

Older children have more questions and deserve accurate information about what is happening and the potential impact to them. Knowledge empowers older children, while minimizing their questions or concerns can create fear and mistrust.

HELPING KIDS COPE WITH STRESS & WORRY

It is normal for children (and adults) to feel worried during times of stress. It is important to teach children how to cope with these feelings.

As caregivers for children, it is also important to take care of yourself. Taking time to decompress, process information, and expel stress allows caregivers to stay resilient for their families and children – and sets a good example. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious about the COVID-19 outbreak, take a moment to address your own concerns and fears before having conversations with your children.

Share with your child what you're doing to stay safe.

Staying home from school (and other places) to decrease the chance of being around people who might be sick. This is called social distancing.

Washing hands to protect from getting sick. The CDC recommends frequently washing hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. Try singing – 20 seconds is the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs.

Staying home doesn't mean you have to feel alone.

Stay in touch with friends and family. You could call, video chat or write a letter.

Help children learn to stay calm and manage emotions.

Try a simple stress relief activity like breathing slowly in and out while counting to three ("Breathe in: 1-2-3; Breathe out: 1-2 3").

The technique is simple yet effective: Bring your attention to your breath and your body. Focus your attention on the here and now: noticing the sights, sounds, and smells around you and what you're feeling in your body. Continue to breath slowly in and out—gently bringing your mind back to your body and breath every time it drifts—until you feel calmer.

Encourage kids to stay busy with other activities while they are at home.

Develop a routine at home and stick to it. For example, set times in the schedule for morning wake-up, meals, and bedtime. Build into the schedule educational activities, exercise and play times. Allowing time for fresh air near home should be part of that routine.

ACTIVITIES TO TRY WHILE STAYING HOME

Keep children engaged and learning by trying new activities throughout the week. Consider learning a new skill or hobby together as a family. Think back to the “old days” – before screens and social media. What did you do for fun?

Outdoor time

Try to get outside every day!

- Enjoy the spring-time changes; sunshine, buds, blossoms plants and animals.
- Start a garden or plant seeds inside.
- Take a walk.
- Nature “scavenger hunts” and I Spy.

Social distancing

Staying home without feeling “cooped up”.

Connect with your family members and see how they are doing

- Send cards and letters, artwork and drawings, or stories the kids create.
- Consider phone/video calls to friends and family.

Take photos of things you are doing at home, then share with your friends and family.

Screen-free time

Set up an area with crafting supplies, books, and other activities.

- Puzzles
- Coloring and journaling
- Reading
- Imagination games
- Exercise
- Family game nights
- Cooking meals together
- Creating plays and putting on a show at home
- Singing, music, dance

Educational screen time

A caregiver should participate too!

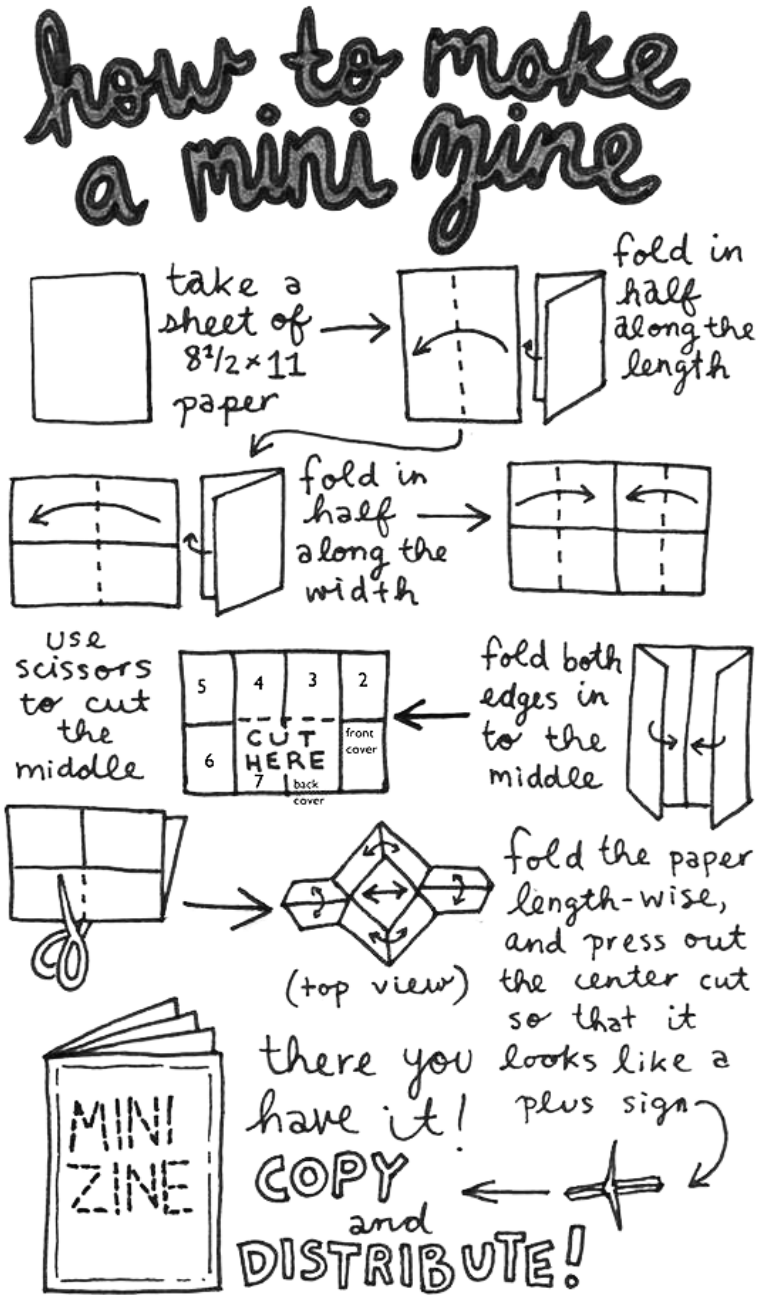
Work on school curriculum – using tablets, computers etc.

- Follow your child’s curriculum if one is provided.
- If none are available or you want to add to it consider:
    - Mobymax.com
    - Khanacadamey.com
    - Abcmouse.com
    - Commoncoresheets.com
    - K5learning.com

Watch educational television programs.

COVID-19 COMIC BOOK FOLDING INSTRUCTIONS

The comic on the next page is a fun activity to share with your child after answering some of their questions. Use the instructions below to learn how to fold it into a mini magazine. Some people find it easier to learn by watching a video. Here is a YouTube video teaching you how to fold it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxqr9e3wCxI.

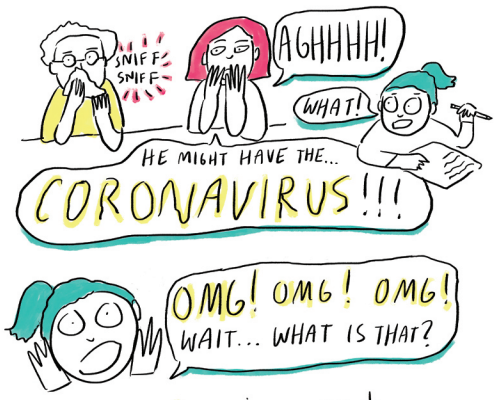


Exploring the New CORONAVIRUS

A Comic Just for Kids

By Malaka Gharib

It's a word you might have heard at school or online or on T.V.



This coronavirus is a newly discovered virus. It causes a disease called COVID-19.

Most people who have gotten sick with this coronavirus have had a mild case.

And there aren't a lot of cases in kids. If kids do get the virus, it tends to be very mild.

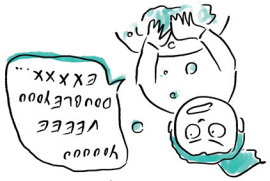
People who are much older or who already have health problems are more likely to get sicker with coronavirus.

If anyone gets sick and feels like they might have coronavirus, they can immediately call their doctors and get help.

There are some things you can do to protect yourself, family and friends from getting sick.

1 WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN

- USE SOAP AND WATER
- WASH FOR AT LEAST 20 SECONDS. IF IT HELPS, SING THE ABCS WHILE YOU DO IT— THAT'S ABOUT 20 SECONDS.
- WASH AFTER USING THE BATHROOM OR BEING IN PUBLIC SPACES (LIKE THE BUS OR PLANE AROUND).

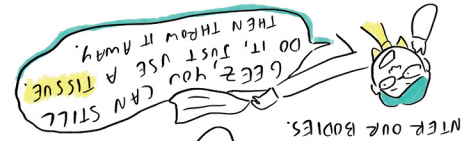


2 SNEEZE INTO YOUR ELBOWS

- CORONAVIRUS IS BELIEVED TO SPREAD THROUGH LITTLE DROPLETS OF FLUID FROM YOUR LUNGS.
- IF YOU SNEEZE INTO YOUR ELBOWS, YOU CAN PREVENT GERMS FROM GOING INTO THE AIR AND ONTO YOUR HANDS.

3 AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE

- DON'T PICK YOUR NOSE, DON'T TOUCH YOUR MOUTH, DON'T RUB YOUR EYES.
- THESE ARE THE PLACES WHERE GERMS ENTER OUR BODIES.



It doesn't matter where you come from or what country your parents are from.

ANYBODY.

It's very important to remember that this kind of virus can affect

AND DON'T FORGET!

There are a LOT of helpers out there who are working to protect you. It is NOT your job to worry.

But seriously, though... PLEASE wash your hands!!!