

# Talking to children about Covid 19

*Advice from a Primary Mental Health Worker*

## What should we say to children?

There is so much on the news, on the radio and in the papers about Covid-19/ coronavirus. Everyone is talking about it. It may be a good idea to try if possible to limit this when the children and young people are around. Maybe ask friends and family not to discuss their worries when the children are around even if they appear to be happy playing. They will be listening.

It can be hard for children to understand all the different views. They may misunderstand things that they have overheard and their imagination may become muddled between what is real and what is not.

If you can get hold of the facts from the NHS and Government websites you can say that these notes will explain what is being done by the government. Let teenagers look at these websites and explain that other less reliable sites may say different things and may not always be telling the truth.

Try not to let covid-19/corona virus dominate all your conversations.

Try to get a balance between over talking or over exposure to the news and shielding children too much from it.

Children/teenagers may come in the room when parents/carers are watching something in the news or discussing what is happening.

It is important at these times *not to suddenly* switch things off or stop the conversation abruptly as this may spark curiosity and imagination about what might be happening. Imagination can sometimes play out events more dramatically than the reality of a situation.

Children and young people may hear or have heard that older people are being more effected by this virus and they may have concerns about grandparents/ elderly people in their family. Reassure them that this is why the government are taking isolation and social-distancing measures; to protect these groups.

Older children will have access to social media and be hearing many stories about what is happening.

## Tell the truth

The best way is to be as honest and truthful as possible.

The way you speak to a child/teenage will of course depend on the age/child that you are talking to.

If you have more than one child you may want to talk to them individually so you can tailor the conversation to their age.

Try to find a time when you are feeling as calm as possible to have a conversation about what is happening.

Try to have as many facts as possible

It is ok though not to know. Not knowing and managing this is a part of life.

It is ok too to let them know that you feel worried too. It is human to feel worried about big changes.

It can be a relief for children to see that a parent/carer can feel worried but still be ok. If parents and carers feel they need to talk about worries, it is helpful to have in mind other trusted adults they can phone or speak to.

### **Leaving space for questions**

Children tend to repeat themselves when they are feeling uncertain or worried. They may ask the same question a number of times.

Routines may change and this in itself can feel unsettling for children.

If you are not able to answer as at yet there is not the information to, try not to make things up to make them feel better.

Join your children in the not knowing and let them know that it can feel unsettling not to know.

Alongside all that isn't known however, there are ways in which children/teenagers can be reassured with things that *are* known. Examples of this are that if they are isolated, parents/carers will be there. Things that they could do at home, games etc.

Children can ask big questions at sometimes inconvenient times. If this happens, try to let them know that you have heard them and their question is important. Let them know that you will talk to them about it later.

If you feel you need support below are some websites that could be of help.

**Family Lives:** 0808 8002222 or <http://www.familylives.org.uk/>

**Family Line:** 0808 800 5678 or <http://www.familyline.org.uk/>

**Young Minds Parent Helpline:** 0808 802 5544 or [http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for\\_parents](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents)