

Why it's important to talk to children about how COVID-19 is affecting our lives

- We all want to protect our children from worry.
- We may be feeling overwhelmed, stressed and anxious about what is happening around us.
- It's hard to make plans or know what will happen in the future.
- Even very young children can tell when adults are stressed and worried.
- Children are also seeing so many changes to their daily routines, at school and maybe at home. This can make it harder for them to cope.
- We need to talk to our children so they are not trying to work out what's happening, or worrying on their own.

How to talk to children

- It can feel hard to find the right words to talk with our children about what is happening, or know how much to share with them.
- Ask your children what they know and believe about the changes they have noticed. This helps you build on what they know, and you can explain anything they have got wrong or muddled up about.
- Giving them a simple but true explanation will help.
- Talking honestly to our children about serious illness helps them understand what is happening; it's good for our children and for our family.
- Don't be afraid to talk to children about your feelings. This will teach them the words to talk about their own feelings and help them to share their emotions with you.

What children understand at different ages

- **Early Years (0-3):** No one is too young to feel worried by changes and illness. Even toddlers will notice if they are not seeing important people in their lives and they can't hug the people they love. They can find this confusing and upsetting.
- **KS-1 (4-7 year-olds):** At this stage children may blame themselves for illness or death. Children can believe that something they said or did caused someone to get ill or die; this is known as 'Magical Thinking'. For example, believing Grandma got ill because they didn't go to bed when they were told.
- **KS-2 and older (7-11 +):** When young people worry, their feelings can show as anger or rage, as well as tears and sadness. Returning to school, children may pretend to be in control, but inside they could be feeling frightened about coping with the changes in school/home and the future.

TOP TIPS

- Use "we" when talking about feelings. This helps children feel they are not alone.
- Some helpful words for talking about feelings: worried, frustrated, confused, unhappy, scared, sad, lonely, strange, fed-up, cross.
- You could:
 1. Make a feelings jar
 2. Think about different animals to describe changes in mood (e.g. when I am cross I feel like a stomping elephant, but when I am scared I feel like a tiny shy mouse that wants to hide).
 3. Draw around a member of the family on a piece of old wallpaper/newspaper and show our bodies change with each feeling (e.g. heart races, hands get sweaty).
 4. With older children, brainstorm as many different words as possible to describe emotions and display them as a graffiti wall picture.
- It is helpful to talk about "changes" rather than "crisis" or "pandemic".
- Use positive language about school. Instead of talking about "catching up" "lost learning" or "missed time", talk about "moving forward" and "looking forward" and "building".
- Don't worry if you can't answer your children's questions. It's better to say you don't know than making it up.
- Reassure your child(ren) by saying "*As a family we will get through this together, no matter what happens*".