

## Talking to Young Children about the Pandemic

Why can't I go to school? I miss my friends. I want to see Grandma! We are home, why are you always working and not playing with me? These may be questions you hear in your own homes or that other caregivers have asked you how to answer for their own children. Below are possible ways to answer commonly asked questions. We encourage you to use your own words, consider the child's temperament and developmental level, and let the child lead the conversation.

### HOW CAN I TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19 WITHOUT SCARING THEM? WOULDN'T IT BE EASIER TO JUST TELL THEM NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IT?

- **TIPS:** This pandemic has changed children's day-to-day lives significantly. Children pick up on the worry of the adults around them. They hear bits and pieces of news reports and wonder what is happening. Talking with children about COVID-19 will lessen some of their worries. Talk to them openly. Validate their feelings. Keep it brief and simple.
- **SAMPLE PHRASES:** *"Everything is different now. You feel scared about the bad germs. We are staying home, and you keep hearing about this virus. The coronavirus is making a lot of people sick. We can help keep ourselves and others safe by staying home right now."*

### WHY CAN'T I GO TO SCHOOL OR PLAY WITH MY FRIENDS?

- **TIPS:** Validate children's feelings. Provide a brief explanation. If possible, offer to set up a phone call or video chat with friends or teachers so they can see and talk to them.
- **SAMPLE PHRASES:** *"You are missing your friends and teachers. It is sad when we cannot see them. Right now, we are helping each other stay safe by staying home and not spreading germs."*

### WHY ARE PEOPLE WEARING MASKS?

- **TIPS:** Seeing people wearing masks can be scary for many young children. Acknowledging that it is not what they are used to and giving a brief explanation can help ease some of the worry.
- **SAMPLE PHRASES:** *"You are noticing that people are wearing masks and that is not what you are used to seeing. Wearing masks right now helps to keep everyone safe because it helps us to not spread germs."*

### WHY CAN'T I SEE GRANDMA/GRANDPA/MY BROTHER/MOMMY/DADDY? ARE THEY MAD AT ME?

- **TIPS:** If a child is separated from a close loved one due to living in multiple homes, being in foster care, or simply due to the pandemic, be sure they know this will not last forever and the loved ones are not upset with them. Validate their feelings. When possible, set up telephone calls or video chats with loved ones.
- **SAMPLE PHRASES:** *"You are feeling sad that you cannot be with Grandma. It makes me sad, too. Let's call Grandma on the phone to talk to her. You can also draw her some pictures, and we can mail them to her."*

### WHY WON'T YOU PLAY WITH ME? YOU'RE NOT AT WORK.

- **TIPS:** It is difficult for young children to understand why everyone is at home and why parents are working. Be sure to schedule some time to play, and let children know when that will be.
- **SAMPLE PHRASES:** *"We are home together so that we can stay safe and help others stay safe. But I still have to work while we are home. I can play with you for a few minutes in half an hour. Let's set a timer while you wait. Now what can you do while I work?"*

Children may have many other questions about the pandemic. It is important to listen to their questions and validate their feelings. Provide simple explanations. Let them know that there will be a time when they can go to school again, see their friends and family again, and play at the park, but for now, we are helping to keep everyone safe.

Many well-trusted folks have developed resources that help explain COVID-19, the Coronavirus, Social Distancing, and other concepts that have become a daily part of our lives. Check them out below. Please review the resources before sharing to make sure you are comfortable with the information. We have indicated which have materials in Spanish and other languages.

### Social Stories about Social Distancing

- Time to Come In, Bear – Social Story About Social Distancing - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA\\_SsZFYw0w&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA_SsZFYw0w&feature=emb_logo)
- Why Can't I Go To School social story (available in 18 languages from consciousdiscipline.com) - [https://consciousdiscipline.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/Free-Resources/Printable-Posters-Tools-Activities/Why-Cant-I-Go-To-School-Social-Story/English\\_CD\\_School-Closed-Social-Story.pdf](https://consciousdiscipline.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/Free-Resources/Printable-Posters-Tools-Activities/Why-Cant-I-Go-To-School-Social-Story/English_CD_School-Closed-Social-Story.pdf)

### Child-friendly Stories about the Coronavirus

- Something Strange Happened in My City (available as a video in English & Chinese, and in PDF in multiple languages) - <https://socialstorycenter.com/social-stories/>
- Coronavirus comic for kids (available in English, Spanish, & Chinese) - <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>
- COVID story with pages about emotions (available in 25 languages) - <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>
- Coronavirus coloring book - <https://together.stjude.org/content/dam/together/en-us/other/covid-19/coronavirus-for-kids-together.pdf>
- The Story of the Oyster and the Butterfly: The Coronavirus and Me - [https://susanguttridge.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/anagomez\\_oysterandthebutterflymar312020.pdf](https://susanguttridge.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/anagomez_oysterandthebutterflymar312020.pdf)

### Additional Resources for Talking to Children about Coronavirus

- Child Mind Institute - <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
- CDC Talking with Children about the Coronavirus (available in many languages) - [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschoools-childcare%2Ftalking-with-children.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschoools-childcare%2Ftalking-with-children.html)
- PBS resources for talking to kids about coronavirus (available in English & Spanish) - <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>
- Zero to Three – Tips for Families - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>
- Resources from Conscious Discipline - <https://consciousdiscipline.com/covid-19-five-helpful-responses-for-families/>