

# RESILIENCE BOOSTER:

## TIPS FOR PARENTS IN TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS. (COVID-19)



If you are a parent or caregiver and feeling unsure about what to share or how much to say to your children about the Covid-19 outbreak, you are not alone.

Here are some tips on how to communicate with your children about the virus:

### 1. Help children feel safe.

Kids may feel anxiety about the virus. Stay calm. Reassure children that this is temporary and that they, and you, are going to be just fine. Give kids space to share their fears. It's natural for kids to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let your child know that kids don't seem to get as sick as adults. Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them. Give your child specific things they can do to feel in control. Teach kids that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often can help them stay strong and well. Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy. Young kids might be reassured to know that hospitals and doctors are prepared to treat people who get sick. Older kids might be comforted to know that scientists are working to develop a vaccine.

### 2. Give them facts, and let them lead the discussion.

Children need simple, honest answers. You might say: "The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are very, very tiny, and when they get inside your body, they can make you sick. The germs get in your body through your nose, mouth or eyes. When someone coughs and touches a doorknob, and then you touch the doorknob, those germs might get into your body. It's helpful to wash our hands a lot and try to stay away from big crowds." Follow your child's lead. Some kids may want to spend time talking. But if your kids don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's OK. Tell kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. "Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open. You can say, 'Even though we don't have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, mom or dad will let you know, too.'

Let them lead the discussion. Too much information can create anxiety. Answer only what they ask. If you're looking for specific words to use, BrainPOP put out a great little video for young children. Check it out at <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>

### 3. Give them power — and responsibility.

Kids do better when they have power; it's one of their emotional needs. And this is a great time to give it to them. After all, children are proving to be kind of like superheroes in this; their bodies seem to have an extraordinary ability to fight off the coronavirus in ways that many other bodies cannot. Kids can help their neighbors and loved ones stay safe and healthy if they frequently wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Remind them to wipe down their devices often, as well, and to cough or sneeze into their elbows or a tissue. You might tell them that hand-washing is like kryptonite to the coronavirus. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading to others. Be a good role model and let your kids see you washing your hands often.

### 4. Empathy, empathy, empathy.

Allow kids to express the full range of their emotions, and receive those feelings with empathy. If their fears and frustrations are minimized or dismissed, they likely will show up in other ways — fighting with siblings, throwing



tantrums or being generally uncooperative. For small children with big emotions, get on their level and say something affirming like, "I imagine you are worried about getting sick. I wonder if you are frightened about all the things that are suddenly changing." For kids feeling anxiety due to social isolation, you could say, "It's so frustrating to not compete in your dance team program. You had looked forward to that for months!" You don't have to agree with a child's thoughts or feelings to acknowledge them without judgment or minimizing. Let your kids know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times. Everyone does. Recognizing these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience. Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions and avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.

#### **5. Keep your child's developmental stage and temperament in mind.**

Depending on their ages, stages and temperaments, some children will require more reassurance or more time to adopt new habits and routines than others. The situation is unique, and so is your child. Be patient and keep your expectations in check.

#### **6. Try to maintain a normal routine.**

Even as schools have closed, try to establish a new routine, as best you can. As we all know, some kids are frightened and overwhelmed by big changes in their environments. For these little ones, allow plenty of time for them to adapt to the new system. Try making a calendar, perhaps with pictures, that helps kids envision how things will go. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy.

#### **7. Screen Time and Outdoor Time**

If you have established screen time limits with your children, you may need to temporarily adjust your screen-time limits. Try to be specific about how much time is allowed and with whom they can communicate. Social apps, such as Skype or Facetime, where your kids can see their friends, can help them feel connected. Social connection is important, especially at a time of social distancing. If kids 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. Be aware of how your kids get news and information, especially older kids who go online. Point them to age-appropriate content so they don't end up finding news shows or outlets that scare them or have incorrect information. Also remember that they need to run and play. Without school recess, you may want to implement "yard time" and try out new games to get them moving.

#### **8. Take care of yourself.**

These are anxiety-producing times. We parents are shouldering a lot. Be sure to take care of yourself. Too much discouraging news is bad for our health — and our kids' health. Run a bath, take a walk or a long afternoon nap. Look for sensory experiences — pet the dog or cat, flip through a family vacation album, put on some music or bake cookies. Do whatever you can to calm your own nerves so that you can handle your children's difficult questions and challenging behavior. Deal with your own anxiety. When you're feeling most anxious or panicked, that isn't the time to talk to your kids about what's happening with the coronavirus. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions.

**The days ahead will be difficult but this is also a time to authentically connect with your kids, learn about their lives and interests, and spend quality time together.**



- For more parent tips and information on how to support your kids, visit our Facebook page [@KeikiToCareerKauai](#)
- Do you have specific questions about parenting and want to talk to someone? Call the Parent Line at 1-800-816-1222 to get help with parenting challenges and child and adolescent behavior.
- Feeling anxious about Covid-19 or just need someone to talk to? You are not alone. The Crisis Line is available to help, 24/7 by phone or text. Call 1-800-753-6879 or Text ALOHA to 741741.