

Mayo CYPSC - Talking to Children and Young People about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Advice for Parents/Guardians



Children and young people need factual, age appropriate information about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and concrete instruction about how to avoid spreading it. Without the facts, they often imagine situations far worse than reality. Let the child/young person's questions and their age guide as to how much information you provide.

Very young children need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe and that the people they care about are safe. They may ask: *Will I get sick? Will mum or dad get sick? Will granny/grandad get sick?* Reassure them that the Government is working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy.

- Explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with the virus
- Tell them that not everyone will get the virus and that the vast majority who get it recover fully

Older children may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy.

- Provide or direct them to where they can find accurate, factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control (see end of document for recommended sources)
- Children can feel less anxious and more in control when given guidance on what they can do to prevent infection – give them this information

Children and young people **look to the adults in their lives to guide them** on how to react to worrying and stressful events. If the adults in their lives seem overly worried, their own anxiety may rise.

- If they are anxious, let them talk about their feelings and guide them in reframing their thoughts and concerns to a more helpful way of thinking
- Give them extra attention and time, to talk about their concerns, fears and questions
- Remember, children and young people do not always talk about their concerns readily - watch for cues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do housework, etc.
- It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing and then come back with further questions
- Reassure children and young people that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may be based on rumours and inaccurate information

Try to avoid constantly discussing updates on the status of COVID -19, as this can increase anxiety.

- Try to limit children/young people’s access to information on the internet/television/social media that might be upsetting to them
- Remind children/young people that no individual or group is ‘responsible’ for the virus
- Remind them that they should not make negative comments about others in relation to the virus - challenge any negative comments they make or any stereotyping

Things you can do include:

- Encourage children/young people to continue with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities (see links below), but don’t push them if they seem upset or overwhelmed
- Maintain a normal routine as much as possible - keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring
- Doing things together as families can really help (board games, etc.) – try to get out and about in nature and the fresh air, just remember to maintain proper social distancing

Look after yourself - This is a stressful time for everyone – particularly so for parents and those caring for children and young people. There are steps you can take to help this (see additional links below), such as:

- Try to structure your day
- Get some exercise and fresh air

Useful Resources/Sources of Information:

1. Health Service Executive (HSE) [information page about the Coronavirus](#)
2. HSE advice explaining [social distancing](#)
3. Guidance on [minding your mental health during the Coronavirus](#)
4. [Childrens comic exploring the Coronavirus](#)
5. This is a link to a video where the [Deputy Chief Medical Officer answered some common questions for RTÉ Junior’s News 2Day programme](#) (from a few days ago)
6. World Health Organisation (WHO) [Myth buster page](#)
7. [Handwashing storybook guide](#) from Safefood (for small children)
8. [Handwashing video for children](#) from the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK
9. Irish Times news article that provides guidance on [home tuition with children](#), including useful links to online resources

**This document has been produced by Mayo CYPSC, bringing together guidance documentation from the HSE and other recognised authorities.*

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