



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)  
info@cancercaare.org  
www.cancercaare.org

fact sheet

# TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

The impact of the coronavirus may increase the fear and worry children may be experiencing about their own safety and the safety of their loved ones. Parents, family members and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children understand the information they hear in a way that minimizes their anxieties. When talking to children, it is important to keep a few principles in mind.

## CONTINUE TO TEACH CHILDREN THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Although your family's daily routine may be disrupted considerably, children benefit from structure. Put together a daily schedule to provide children with consistency. Continue to encourage daily hygiene habits, such as washing one's hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Healthy behaviors also include promoting self-care and overall well-being. Studies show that masks can greatly reduce the transmission of the coronavirus when worn in public.



## PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO MEDIA

It is important to observe how media impacts children and to monitor children's access to reputable information. It can be unclear for children to understand what to believe. Continuous media coverage can cause heightened anxiety. Keep in mind that the information around us may be geared to an adult population and can be difficult to understand at a younger age. Determine a plan involving the amount of information the family will listen to daily.

## OFFER WAYS FOR CHILDREN TO EXPRESS FEARS AND CONCERNS

Children may seek a space to speak about their thoughts and feelings related to what they have heard about the coronavirus. Allow the space for these conversations even when you do not have all the answers. Provide validation for the feelings they are expressing and reassurance that they are not alone. Knowing that you are listening helps them feel heard and valued.

## BE HONEST AND PROVIDE FACT-BASED INFORMATION

As much as we want to shield children from any external worries, it is important to relay appropriate information to them. Children should hear news from trusted adults, rather than potentially non-factual information from anyone else. Hearing from trusted adults allows children to feel like part of a team or family unit that is working toward a common goal of safety and good health.

(over)

For children of a younger age, it may be helpful to provide very basic information that can get the point across, but does not amplify confusion about an already frightening situation. Older children may require further explanation, including why they will not be attending school-related activities or socialize with friends as they are accustomed to doing.

## CONTINUE TO UPDATE YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19 AND CANCER

Your child may be familiar or involved with the rigors of your cancer diagnosis. Help your child understand the impact the coronavirus might have and the importance of keeping you and your family safe and healthy. Children may respond to verbal and nonverbal cues, so it is often best to keep them informed about any cancer-related changes, even disappointing ones, such as receiving treatment in a different way or the postponement of your treatment. As for the logistics of any treatments, be aware of when children are no longer able to attend normal clinical visits and make other plans for their care. Changes to your treatment do not mean that anything has changed regarding your diagnosis, but rather that your medical team is taking appropriate measures due to greater public health concerns. Assure your child that your doctors are doing their job to care for you in the best way they know how.

## TIPS TO REVIEW

- Reinforce healthy habits
- Reduce access to media networks that could increase fear and anxiety in children
- Help provide accurate and honest information
- Allow children to ask questions so that they feel heard and valued
- Use age-appropriate language that they can understand
- Remain calm and reassuring when interacting with children, as they can pick up emotional cues
- Keep your children updated on any changes to your cancer treatment



## RESOURCES

Our knowledge of the coronavirus is constantly changing. These high-level sources can keep you updated on new developments and offer other material.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMSHA)**  
[www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus)

**National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)**  
[www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications](http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications)

## CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/CancerCare](https://facebook.com/CancerCare)

**Instagram:** @CancerCareUS

**Twitter:** @CancerCare

*Edited by Lauren Chatalian, MSW, LMSW, and Sarah Paul, MSW, LCSW*

*This fact sheet is supported by supported by a contribution from GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly, Novartis Oncology and Seattle Genetics.*



CANCERcare®

National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

© 2020 CancerCare®