

Talking to Your Child About COVID-19

This tip sheet is designed to provide support and guidance for caregivers when talking about COVID-19 with their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

THE BENEFITS OF TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

It's likely that your child has noticed changes in their routines caused by the spread of COVID-19. They will also hear things, in conversations or media coverage, about the pandemic. It is important to talk to your children about these issues.

Caregivers can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear. People fear what they don't understand and explaining things in an honest but calm manner can go a long way to help your child regulate their own reactions. Helping them understand the changes, and process their related feelings, can make this process easier for everyone.

Individuals with autism may need additional support to process the news and adapt to the many changes they are facing. Understanding the consequences of infection can make them more able, or willing, to engage in isolation activities and hygiene practices that can slow the spread of infection.

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES

- **Support their understanding:** Use direct and clear language to talk to your child about COVID-19. For example, you may say "The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are very tiny, and when they get inside your body, they can make you sick". Consider using social narratives and visual supports.
- **Offer opportunities for expression:** Provide multiple opportunities for your child to express their feelings as they are able through family and individual discussions, writing activities, movie making, or play.
- **Prioritize coping and calming skills:** Allow opportunities for your child to engage in coping and calming strategies when needed (e.g., rocking in a chair, listening to music, etc.).
- **Maintain routines:** Individuals with autism may cope best when daily home routines are only minimally interrupted.
- **Build new routines:** It may also be necessary to create new routines during this time, as there are many new demands of caregivers. Consider using a visual schedule for support.
- **Foster connections (from a distance):** Build in opportunities for daily social contact with family, friends, or others via social media outlets.
- **Be aware of changing behaviours:** Caregivers should be aware of the behavior of individuals with autism during these uncertain times and be alert for signs of anxiety and depression.

RELATED RESOURCES

To support understanding:

- A message to children: [Lego Justin Trudeau](#)
- Social Story: [What is Corona Virus?](#)

To encourage expression:

- [Zine Making 101](#) - Free resource to inspire the mini-magazine process.
- [1 Second Everyday App](#) - Free app to make videos with pictures from each day.

To encourage the use of coping and calming strategies:

- [Go Noodle](#) - Free movement and mindfulness videos
- [Virus Anxiety](#) - Meditation exercises and information to help address anxiety
- Surrey Place's related tip sheet: Emotional Regulation - Supporting an Anxious Child

For maintaining and building routines:

- [ConnectAbility Visuals Engine](#)
- Surrey Place's related tip sheets:
 - Using Social Stories to Support Changes in Routine
 - Using a Visual Schedule to Support Routines

To foster connections:

- [WhatsApp](#) - Free messaging and calling app.
- [Marco Polo](#) - Free app for video messages.

To support changes in behavior, anxiety, and depression:

- [Distress Centres of Greater Toronto](#) - Helpline that provides support and crisis intervention at 416-408-4357.
- [What's Up? Walk In](#) - Do you need to talk to someone? Call Mental Health TO to be connected to a counsellor 1-866-585-MHTO (6486)

HELP SLOW DOWN THE SPREAD



Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. Throw the tissue in the garbage right away.



Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Sing a preferred song for 20 seconds.



Try not to touch your face, mouth, nose, and eyes. This will help keep germs out of your body.



If you don't have soap and water, tell your child that you are going to use special hand cleaner (i.e., hand sanitizer).



Keep things clean. Clean objects you touch the most: desks, doorknobs, light switches, and remotes.



If you're sick, stay home. You don't want other people's germs, & other people don't want your germs.

REFERENCES

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