



TIPS for Communicating With Kids During Crises

Even if kids don't ask, they're often aware when something is unusual. Ignoring that reality can add to their anxiety and fear. Here are some tips on communicating during difficult times.

Be the adult.

- Kids want and need to know that their parents are aware of the situation and are taking care of them. Reassure them that you will keep them safe, that everything will be OK, and that they don't have to worry about "grown-up" things.

Let them be kids.

- Allow enough time for playing and doing nothing. Play is essential for childhood learning and development, and it may be more important than ever during a crisis.
- Some children may regress during periods of stress. Be patient. Sometimes the best thing for the parent to do is play along.

Talk openly, but at their level.

- Kneeling down or sitting with littler kids can help your child keep eye contact and feel heard.
- Older kids may be aware of the pandemic or social unrest and can understand more complex details and emotions.

Answer their questions, then stop.

- Provide factual answers to their questions when possible, but don't go beyond what they asked. Kids are frequently satisfied with simple, straightforward answers. If they're happy with an answer, leave it at that.

Validate their feelings.

- It's normal to experience and express strong emotions during a crisis. No feelings are inherently "bad" or "negative," and learning to accept difficult feelings and to express them appropriately is an important part of growing up.
- Parents can learn to accept their children's feelings without believing they have to "fix" anything.

Listen.

- Turn off your phone to give your child your undivided attention.
- Try to listen more than you talk, but stay engaged and give them nonverbal feedback — nodding, maintaining eye contact — to show that you understand.

Model appropriate behavior, including emotional expressions.

Even if you aren't the best at expressing your feelings, you can learn that skill and grow along with your kids. Children learn how to cope with stress and frustration from the adults around them, so do your best to be a good example. Learn ways to calm and soothe yourself, and let your kids see you doing that.

For additional tips on parenting during COVID-19, check out [Psychology Today's](#) article.



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