

Tips for Families: Coronavirus

The following resources offer tips for families including age-appropriate responses to common questions, a guide to self-care, and activities for young children experiencing social distancing. The information is taken from the www.zerotothree.org website.

Talking about the Coronavirus

[Answering Your Young Child's Questions About Coronavirus](#)

Even if you've kept your toddler away from news about COVID-19 in the media or overhearing adult conversations, they are bound to have questions. Here are some age-appropriate responses to common questions.

[Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#) [offsite link](#)

NPR presents a comic developed from an interview with Tara Powell, Joy Osofsky, PhD, and Krystal Lewis on what kids might want to know about the Coronavirus.

[Why are people wearing masks? Why are people covering their faces?](#)

Read through tips to answer tough questions toddlers may ask about COVID-19.

[Supporting Young Children Isolated Due to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Learn more about common reactions in children when they are faced with stress and things you can do to help.

Time at Home

[Young Children at Home during the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Importance of Self-Care](#)

Self-care is not selfish or indulgent—it's how we keep ourselves well to ensure we are physically, emotionally, and mentally capable of being there for our young children.

[At-Home Activity Guide](#)

With these activities and experiences at-the-ready, you can feel less stressed and more prepared!

Staying Connected

[Five Tips to Make the Most of Video Chats](#)

Can't visit the grandparent's because of new rules or worries? Here are some tips for making the most of your next video chat.

Separated From Your Young Child?

Sheltering in place or self-quarantine frequently means being apart from our family, including our very young children. Those on our “front lines” in this fight—our medical personnel, our first responders, even our grocery store personnel—are making the very difficult choice of staying away, rather than risk infecting their little ones. While these days and weeks are filled with more questions than answers, there are still many ways for parents to keep their connection strong with their little ones.

Sesame Street Resources

Our neighbors on Sesame Street offer these fun activities and guides to staying safe and healthy as part of their new [*Caring for Each Other*](#) [offsite link](#):

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/health/>

How to Wash Your Hands [offsite link](#)

Share the video featuring Bebe to show the right way to stop the spread of germs, and have a child show you how they use soap, then water!

H is for Handwashing [offsite link](#)

Read this storybook to explore the ways that children across the world stay happy and healthy. Invite children to think about how the ways we wash our hands that may be different and similar to our friends in other places.

Answering Your Young Child's Questions About Coronavirus

Here are some age-appropriate responses to the common questions a toddler might have about coronavirus.

Even if you've kept your toddler away from news about COVID-19 in the media or overhearing adult conversations, they are bound to have questions. Here are some age-appropriate responses to the common questions a toddler might have. Most importantly, remember to keep your answers simple and age-appropriate.

- *Why can't I play with that little boy over there?* "We have to take a break from playing with others so we can all stay healthy."
- *Why can't I have a turn with that toy?* "We can't play with other children's toys right now, so we can all stay healthy."
- *Why are we wiping down everything with wipes?* "We wipe things down to keep them clean." You don't need to explain more than this—young children don't understand germs or infection transmission yet.
- *Why is that person wearing a mask?* "Sometimes people wear masks when they aren't feeling well." More on this question [here](#).
- *Why won't Granddad (or other loved one) kiss or hug me?* Reassure your child that their loved one still loves and cares about them very much. Then you can explain: "When a grown-up has a cold, they can keep others from getting sick by not hugging or kissing for a while. When they feel better and are healthy again, the first thing they'll do is give you a big kiss!"
- *Why can't I see mammy (or daddy, granny, etc.)?* If an adult in a child's life needs to be separate from them, children may feel confused about it. Don't worry your young child by talking about sickness or quarantine. You can say, "Mammy needs to be away for a little while, but she will be back soon." Consider ways to stay connected even when physically apart, like video between parent and child. Read more [here](#) on making the most of video chat.
- *Why can't I go to child care/school?* "Your child care is closed right now. Your teacher and your friends are home too, just like you. When child care is open again, you can go back and see your friends. I'll tell you when." Avoid going into details about illness so toddlers don't develop fears about attending child care.

- *Why can't we leave the house? Why can't my friend come over to play?* "Right now, there is a rule that families need to stay home for a little while and be together. That helps us and our friends stay healthy. I know it can be sad when we can't see and play with friends. But there are lots of fun things we can do together at home! Would you like to play chase or do a puzzle?" Check out our [activity guide](#) for play ideas.

Even if your child is too young to ask these questions, you might notice that they still appear curious about all the changes happening around them. You can validate that something different is happening without going into detail. Explain that a change in routine is happening and what your child can expect instead: "You're going to be staying home with Daddy for a little while, instead of going to child care. This morning we'll go on a walk and then we'll have a snack."

Why are people wearing masks? Why are people covering their faces?

Sometimes our toddlers ask us questions that are hard to answer—especially when we're not sure what the right answer is, like the situation many communities are facing with COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus).

For children under three years, it's best to answer their questions simply in language they understand. If children ask about people wearing masks or other face coverings, parents can explain:

- Sometimes people wear masks when they are sick.
- When they are all better, they stop wearing the mask.

Sometimes children might ask follow-up questions like the ones below. At this age, it's important to answer only the questions they ask. Avoid sharing additional information (about germs, what is contagious, etc.) that they can't understand because of their age. Some common follow-up questions might be:

- Is the mask a costume? (No, sometimes people wear masks when they are sick. The mask just means they are not feeling well.)
- Can the person still talk? (Yes. The mask covers their mouth, but they can still talk. Just like if I put my hand over my mouth, I can still talk. [demonstrate])
- Are they scary or a "bad" person? (No. The mask covers up part of their face, but that doesn't mean they are scary or bad. They are wearing a mask because they are sick. That's all. When they are better, they will take the mask off.)
- Will I get sick? (Everybody gets sick sometimes. If you get sick, Mammy/Daddy will take care of you until you are all better. The doctors will help you, too.)

If you live in a community where many people are wearing masks, your child may want to “pretend play” wearing a mask. This is very typical for toddlers! Pretend play is one way that children make sense of their world, by “trying on” the roles and people they see in the world around them. As a parent, you can decide how comfortable you are with this play theme. You might also suggest pretend play around medical roles (doctor/nurse with a teddy bear) to focus on how people take care of others when they are sick.

During stressful times, what children need most is you—a safe, secure relationship where they can express their feelings and questions. Here are some tips:

- Keep daily routines (naptime, bedtime) as consistent as possible for your child.
- Limit your child’s exposure to media reports about COVID-19. Remember, your child is soaking in the tension you’re feeling as you watch the news.
- Discuss your own questions/worries about COVID-19 when your child is out of earshot.
- Practice good hygiene to limit exposure to COVID-19. The HSE website has helpful resources on this topic.