

**MOT Webinar Series:
Communicating with your Child about COVID-19**

Key Resource List:

- Anxiety Canada: Talking to Kids About COVID-19:
<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/talking-to-kids-about-covid-19/>
- Unicef: Tips for Parenting During the COVID-19 Outbreak:
<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips>
- “Brain Pop”: Animated video on COVID-19:
<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>
- NPR: Exploring the New Coronavirus comic:
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>
- “My COVID-19 Time Capsule” activity:
<https://www.newfieldschool.co.uk/my-2020-covid-time-capsule-sheets/>

Top Tips:

- Parents often wonder how much to talk to their child about difficult subjects such as COVID-19. There is no “one size fits all” approach and *YOU* are the expert on your child. It is important to consider your child’s age, maturity level, personality, and past experiences when deciding how to talk to your child. The following are some general tips that may help.
- **Be aware of your own emotions**
 - Children are “tuned in” to their parents’ emotions
 - Important to take care of yourself and get support so that you can be calm and reassuring when talking to your child
 - Prepare yourself for talking to your child by talking through your own emotions first with someone you trust
- **Encourage your child to talk with you about anything/everything**
 - You are a model for your child; if you react to a topic with fear, they may feel fear
 - Children may try to protect their parents from added stress by not talking about their worries
 - Children need to learn to express difficult feelings and deal with uncertainty
 - A child’s fears can grow out of proportion if they don’t get the chance to talk about them
 - Message: “Nothing is too painful or scary for me to talk about with you”

- **Find out how your child is doing by asking questions and having open-ended conversations**
 - Ask your child what they know about COVID-19, what worries they have, and what they want to know.
 - E.g., “Right now, there is lots of talk on the news and all around us about this virus. What have you heard about it? Is there anything more you want to know?”
 - Ask your child question to check level of understanding and correct any “myths” or unrealistic fears
 - Use how, what, when, why questions to start conversations
 - To encourage your child to open up, give them full attention and be sympathetic and non-judgemental (e.g., “It sounds like you’ve been feeling really worried about this”; “I can understand why you feel sad to be missing soccer and play dates)

- **Use repetition**
 - Children learn through repetition
 - As time goes by, check your child’s understanding again and provide more information...then repeat!
 - Use a variety of methods to communicate (e.g., talking, imaginary play, art, videos)
 - See Key Resource List for links for a video, comic, and “time capsule” that can help open conversations
 - For young children, can create own book or pictures about COVID-19 and what we can do to keep safe

- **Be honest, but don’t share unnecessary details**
 - Telling your child the truth increases trust in you as reliable source of information
 - How much you share depends on child’s age and maturity level
 - Children don’t always have emotional maturity to handle difficult details
 - As children get older, generally ASK for the information they need (follow their lead)
 - Offer information slowly, give permission for child to end discussion
 - Don’t force your child to have a conversation. Open the door, but don’t push.

- **It’s OK to not have all the answers!**
 - You can say, “That’s a really good question. I don’t know the answer to that right now, but I can try to find out and get back to you.”
 - Or say, “We don’t have the answer to that question right now, but lots of doctors and scientists are working hard to find that out!”
 - Or try, “I don’t know the answer to that question, but I can tell you what I do know”

- **Heroes not Bullies**
 - Explain COVID-19 has nothing to do with way someone looks, where they come from
 - Tell child we can be caring towards people who are sick and people who take care of them
 - Point out the helpers!