



# Talking to Children About COVID-19

## Head Start Heals - Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. How do we talk to young children about COVID-19?

Young children will have questions about COVID-19. It is important to think about truthful age appropriate responses to questions young children may have and to check in regularly with them around the topic. Keeping answers simple and age appropriate is key. Some questions young children may have include:

Question	Response
“Why can’t I go to school?”	“School is closed right now, your teachers and friends are home, just like you. When school is open again you can go back to see them”
“Will I get sick and die?”	“Everyone gets sick sometimes. We wash our hands and wear our masks to stay healthy. If you get sick we will take care of you until you get better.”
“Why do I need to wear a mask?”	“We wear masks to keep ourselves healthy and to keep our friends healthy, and to keep other people healthy.”
“When will the germs be gone?”	“Doctors and scientists are working hard to make the germs go away, I will let you know when the germs are gone.”

Try not to avoid questions you do not have the answers to. It’s ok to say; “I don’t know.”

Young children may have fears or worries related to COVID-19, it is important to validate those feelings and reassure children that important adults in their lives are doing everything they can to keep them safe and healthy. Continue the conversation about COVID-19, with children as new information comes out.

### Additional Resources:

Why Can’t I Go to School Scripted Story - English

Source Credit: Kerrie Fanning, The Playing Field, Reach Dane

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SI-w11Cfp5HJ7QBszoisLcYC14H2PU-/view>

Why Can’t I Go to School?

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/why-cant-i-go-to-school\\_Story.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/why-cant-i-go-to-school_Story.pdf)

Answering Your Young Child's Questions About Coronavirus

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3265-answering-your-young-child-s-questions-about-coronavirus>

10 Tips for Talking About Covid-19 With Your Kids

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids>

Tips for Families: Coronavirus

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/home-activities-tips>

Emergencies and Natural Disasters: Helping Children and Families Cope

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/home-activities-tips>

## **Q. How do we talk to young children about their fears and concerns related to COVID-19?**

Young children may voice fears and concerns related to COVID-19. It is important to give them a place to share these fears or concerns with a trusted adult. Some children may feel scared because they have misinformation or their questions have not been answered so they have created their own ideas about what COVID-19 is. Sharing developmentally, age appropriate information with young children can help them to understand what is happening and feel less concerned. Validating feelings of fear or concern while giving age appropriate information related to COVID-19 in a reassuring way can help children to feel safe and secure (E.g., "I'm afraid I will die from the germs." Possible response will be; "You feel scared about COVID-19, the germ that is making some people sick. Very few kids are getting sick from this germ. We can stay healthy by wearing our masks and washing our hands.") Keeping the conversation going, will also give space for children to share fears or concerns or ask questions related to COVID-19.

### **Additional Resources:**

Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Helping Your Child During A Pandemic Tip Sheet

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pandemic\\_helping-your-child\\_tipsheet.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pandemic_helping-your-child_tipsheet.pdf)

Sesame Street Coronavirus Town Hall Video

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2020/04/25/entire-cnn-sesame-street-coronavirus-town-hall-part-2-vpx.cnn/video/playlists/entire-cnn-sesame-street-coronavirus-town-hall/>

Talking to Children About Covid-19 (Coronavirus) A Parent Resource

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

Home Activities and Tips

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/home-activities-tips>

## Q. I am a teacher. How can I help explain changes young children may see at school because of COVID-19?

It may feel overwhelming to think about all of the changes happening when children return to centers. We can support young children in understanding the changes they may encounter by preparing them ahead of time, actively teaching the new routines, and being responsive to children's needs through supportive and nurturing relationships.

- **Prepare:** New policies may include: wearing a mask, getting your temperature taken before entering school, or limiting the number of children in a classroom or particular area of the classroom. We can help to prepare children for this by making a visual with pictures of the new routine or a video of what entering school will look like upon return. We may also use a social story that can be shared with parents before the start of school. Some activities that were previously available in the classroom may no longer be, such as the sand or water table. We can begin preparing children by explaining why these favorites may not be available (E.g., "The sand and water tables are closed right now but you can play with the blocks or puzzles."). Updating rules, schedules, and routines to account for COVID -19 related changes, can also be a way to help children understand the new expectations or daily schedule (E.g., "Hugs and kisses are for home. At school we can air high five.")
- Actively **teach** new COVID-19 related changes/skills: It is important that we actively teach children about the changes that may have occurred to our daily schedule, routines, or classroom rules. We may also have new COVID-19 related safety procedures or policies to teach children such as mask wearing and social distancing in the classroom. Using strategies that are fun and engaging to teach these new skills can reduce some of the anxiety children may be experiencing. Teachers can use familiar songs with new lyrics to teach about mask wearing or hand washing, or use role playing with a co-teacher to teach about social distancing. Use puppets, props, and social stories to teach these new skills. The Super Friend social story can also be modified to help support new COVID related changes (E.g., Super Friends wear masks to keep themselves and their friends healthy, Super friends wash their hands to keep themselves and their friends safe, super friends use air high fives to show their friends they care about them.)
- **Respond:** Connect and check in with children often throughout the day. Having a calm, reassuring, positive presence will help children adjust quickly and feel safe in their new school environment. Give positive feedback frequently to children throughout the day. Be patient with yourself and the children, change is hard for everyone!

### Additional Resources:

Why Are People Wearing Masks

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces>

Super Friend Social Story

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Implementation/Program/strategies.html>

Helping Your Child During the Pandemic

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pandemic\\_family\\_infographic.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pandemic_family_infographic.pdf)

Sites Currently Serving Children

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/sites-currently-serving-children>