

# Talking to children about COVID-19 and its impact

## *Coping with stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic*

This time may be very challenging for children and adolescents, some of whom might not understand the reasons for school closures and the cancellation of extracurricular activities. In addition, they are likely to be bombarded with information through social media and from their friends that can cause anxiety and alarm.

Young people may also sense the anxiety of their parents, and worry about their own health and that of other family members. For example, young children may not understand why they can no longer hug a grandparent.

Children need to be reassured in a way that is age appropriate. As a first step, you may consider a family meeting to:

- Acknowledge their fears.
- Explain the overall risk of getting the virus and what happens if they do get sick.
- Outline the steps you are taking to keep them and yourself safe during this pandemic.
- Reassure them that young children tend to get a mild form of the virus.
- Discuss any questions they may have.

You may also consider:

- Limiting your children's amount of TV and social media.
- Engaging them in activities that can help them feel empowered.
- Helping your children become better consumers of health information. For example, if they ask you a question, help them to identify credible online sources of information and help them understand the information provided.
- Helping adolescents understand the importance of social distancing, and encouraging them to socialize with friends through digital technology (i.e. videoconference chats, social networks or texts).
- Encouraging your children not to share drinks, makeup or other personal items during this time.
- Advising adolescents not to smoke or vape, and assisting them to stop immediately since sharing vapes or cigarettes are fairly common.