

Helping parents support their teenagers through everyday issues and tough times.

How to talk to your teenager about coronavirus



Between the non-stop media coverage, the physical distancing guidelines and the general uncertainty around school and business closures, we know it's a very challenging time to be parenting a teenager.

It can be really difficult to know how to talk to your teen about coronavirus (COVID-19), especially if you're feeling stressed about it yourself.

If starting this conversation feels too hard right now, you can connect with an experienced family professional through our free, online One-on-one Support service.

Work through your own feelings

Children and young people are really good at picking up on their parents' feelings, so take some time to work through them. Remember that it's okay to feel stressed, and to show your young person how you are managing those feelings.

Some ways to do this include:

- Write down what you're feeling and reflect on why you feel this way.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with a trusted friend or family member. This could be over the phone or via video chat if there is no-one in your household you can talk

with.

- Practise self-care, such as doing some exercise, making home-cooked meals and getting enough sleep.
- Practise mindfulness, and remember that thoughts aren't facts.

Check your headspace

Try to have a conversation about coronavirus when you're feeling relatively calm, not when you're especially stressed or anxious. This could mean putting up some boundaries around conversations. If your teen wants to talk when you're really stressed, you could try saying, 'It's important that we talk about this, but I'm not in the right headspace at the moment. Could we chat about it later today?' Be specific about a time and place. The idea is that by working through your own feelings, you'll feel better and be more available to help your teen.

Know the facts

There's a lot of misinformation about coronavirus being spread by the media and social media. Inform yourself about the facts from trusted sources, such as [Healthdirect](#) (for Australian health advice related to coronavirus) and [World Health Organization](#) (WHO). Be aware that things may change rapidly, so be sure to have the most up-to-date information.

Knowing the facts will make you more confident about keeping the discussion rational. It's likely that your teen has been consuming constant COVID-19 content on social media, so it's important to try and keep the panic levels down.

Here is some essential information about coronavirus as background for your discussions:

- COVID-19 is the short name for 'coronavirus disease 2019'. It is a new virus that the doctors and scientists are still learning about.
- The virus has affected a lot of people recently. The majority of those who get COVID-19 experience only a mild illness. Health experts are working hard to develop treatments and a vaccine.
- You can reduce your risk of getting the virus by practising healthy hygiene habits. For example, cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow (and dispose of the tissue immediately afterwards); don't touch your mouth, nose and eyes; and wash your hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds.
- Listen to the advice from the government, Healthdirect and WHO – they are the experts and will tell us what we need to do.

Talk about their media intake

Ask your teen what media they have been consuming (from the news and social media) about coronavirus. Check if they are aware that some stories about COVID-19 may be based on rumours or incorrect information. You could help them to build their media literacy skills by asking of a particular story: Who's creating this news? Is it credible? How can I tell that it's credible? What's the source?

Then, help them to find reliable sources of information, such as [Healthdirect](#) and [World Health Organization](#). Discuss whether they would be willing to limit their media intake about COVID-19 to checking the internet just a few times a day. Explain that this will help them not to be too overwhelmed by constant updates.

You could also find some fun accounts for them to follow that might help deafen the noise; think things like cute animals, comedy, or cooking videos. We've compiled a bunch on our Youth site [here](#).

Practise open communication

Communicating about coronavirus is particularly tricky because you won't always have easy answers about why it's happening and what exactly it means for your teen.

Some tips to help foster open communication with your teen include:

- Let them know that you understand it's a stressful time and that it's normal to feel upset. Reassure them that they're not alone in this.
- Make space for conversations (in a quiet place where you have some privacy) where you might ask them, 'How are you feeling at the moment?' Share some of the things you are feeling and thinking, along with the plans you're making to take care of them and yourself. Telling them the proactive things you're doing to cope will help them feel less hopeless and uncertain.
- Be accepting of and curious about how they say they're feeling. Ask follow-up questions, such as: 'What do you think is making you feel that way?' or 'Is there anything I can do to help?'

A good way to initiate an open conversation is to share a meal with just the two of you, or to spend time together doing something you both enjoy. If you want more guidance on how to go about this conversation, check out our infographic on [figuring out what's up with your teenager](#).

Offer them reassurance

Let your teen know that it's normal to be feeling stressed or anxious about the current situation. Reassure them of what you're doing to help them stay safe (e.g. practising good hygiene behaviours).

Remind them that you are there to support them, and that doctors and health experts are working hard to keep people healthy.

Have a 'No COVID-19 talk' hour

At the moment, it might feel like coronavirus is all everyone is talking about. While it's important to speak to your teen about it, you could consider setting an hour in the evenings during which no-one mentions COVID-19. Chat about anything other than the virus – what

they've been learning at school, their hobbies, TV shows you're watching, etc. Time spent this way will help to keep a sense of normalcy in the house.

Get extra support

As we've never dealt with something like this before, it may feel overwhelming, even if you've been practising your parenting skills. As most people will be physically distancing or self-isolating, telephone and online services are great options.

Jump on to the [ReachOut Parents Forums](#) to connect safely with other parents and learn from them how they're managing the stress of parenting teens through this challenging time.

You can also access our ReachOut Parents free [One-on-one Support program](#) over the phone and online. You'll be able to connect with an experienced family professional who will listen, guide you through identifying your specific challenges, suggest practical strategies you can try and provide evidence-based resources.

Lifeline (13 11 14) and [Parentline](#) can be accessed for phone and online counselling, with Lifeline phone counsellors on call from 7 pm to midnight, and Kids Helpline available 24/7. If it's available to you, you could consider seeing your GP or mental health professional for extra help (but make sure to follow the advice of [Healthdirect](#) if you're showing symptoms or are in self-isolation). You could also ask your mental health professional if they could chat over Skype/FaceTime if you're in self-isolation.

Did you find what you needed?

- **Yes** - Learn more about effective communication and teenagers.
- **No** - Try our One-on-one professional support.
- **I need to know more** - Read more about stress and teenagers.