

How to explain to young children about the coronavirus

By Tamsin Grimmer, Early Years Director of Linden Learning.

It is difficult to know if and how we should respond to young children at this time. Should we try to shelter them from the situation by avoiding talking about it or should we talk about it in a manner in which our young children will understand?

Tamsin Grimmer shares her ideas about how parents/carers of young children should be responding to this situation.

Children will have noticed that something is different, regardless of whether we have discussed the pandemic with them! They're not going to school, nursery or any of their usual groups, they haven't seen Nanna for several weeks, Mummy and Daddy are always at home and don't even take them to the shops anymore.

We cannot avoid talking with young children about how our lives have changed because of the coronavirus and we shouldn't feel we need to. Children are more resilient and have a greater depth of understanding than we often give them credit for. Sadly children also worry more than we might think, so I want to encourage parents and carers to not be afraid to talk with their children about this situation.

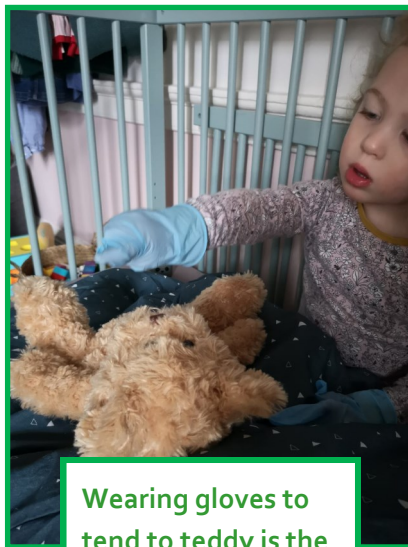
We can be supportive and honest and explain things to our children using language that they will understand.

For example saying, "The coronavirus is a bug that people can get which makes them feel very poorly. They might feel very hot or have a nasty cough. Some people's bodies will find it difficult to recover from the illness. Other people will get totally better. We need to stay at home to help stop the virus from spreading and to help the doctors and nurses to care for the people who are poorly."

We might need to be prepared to talk with our children about death and what this means. Death is a very abstract concept for young children and talking in terms of concrete things that children might understand can help. For example, "When we are dead we do not breathe, our heart stops beating and we cannot play anymore." Try to avoid using analogies like 'falling asleep' or 'at rest'.



Playing at doctors and nurses!



Wearing gloves to tend to teddy is the new norm!

children and can lead to them becoming frightened of resting or sleeping themselves. Instead, we should factually explain about life cycles and that every living thing will die one day. We can reassure them that we might feel sad and miss the person who died, but we have lots of lovely, happy memories that we can share, and possibly photographs to look at to help us to remember their life.

If you have found this leaflet useful, please do get in touch.

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Top Tips

- ✓ Answer any questions about the coronavirus as honestly as possible, remembering that it's OK to say, "I don't know!"
- ✓ Use correct language with the children, e.g. virus, and encourage them to have their own narrative about it.
- ✓ Use this virus as an opportunity to reinforce the importance of hygiene, e.g. hand washing, and make this into a fun game – there are now some online videos to help with this, new songs to sing etc.
- ✓ Read stories and books which include illness and hygiene practices... (e.g. *I don't want to wash my hands* by Tony Ross, *Germs are Not for Sharing* (board book) by Elizabeth Verdick and *Why Must I Wash My Hands?* by Jackie Gaff).
- ✓ Don't talk about the coronavirus to other adults over the children's heads - they will pick up on anxiety or worries.
- ✓ Explain that some people who have other illnesses or people who are very old might get very poorly, but most people who get the virus get totally better.
- ✓ Use playful interactions as a means of sharing about the virus— play at doctors and nurses, make up stories and rhymes, create sock puppets together.
- ✓ Celebrate and share stories about acts of kindness, or of everyday people being superheroes like Captain Tom Moore.
- ✓ Encourage your children to take part in initiatives like #chasetherainbow by drawing a rainbow together and putting it in your window. This is not only fun but helps us all to still feel part of a community.
- ✓ Use technology to support their social lives as well as your own. If possible, video call friends or ask family members to read them a bedtime story over the phone.
- ✓ Lastly, **have fun together**. This is an amazing opportunity for you to spend more time with your child and to enjoy their company.

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