

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT COVID-19



Parenting During Coronavirus

God is in control and works despite and through the diseases in this fallen world (Romans 8:28). At Saturn Road, we are already seeing this. Our church is pulling together as the body of Christ in some beautiful ways. We are here for one another during these challenging times through prayer, support and service. One particular challenge is parenting through the virus. May this resource guide be a help for our parents and grandparents, a strength and a blessing. God bless your family!

Children Respond in a Variety of Ways

Every child is different, and so every child's response to the pandemic will be different. We need to be prepared for this if we're to support our children well. For example, a 6-year-old child is told to wash her hands for as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice. She takes it on board, no questions asked, and becomes the handwashing police for everyone in her family. On the other hand, a 13-year-old girl defies her youth leader's instructions on social distancing and says 'You're not going to stop us hugging!' What worries each child is also vastly different.

Preparing to Talk

Remain calm. Your kids will look to you for clues about how to react. Remind them that how they feel right now is OK, and encourage a hopeful outlook for the future.

Know that silence is not the answer. We have a God who speaks. Our God-given privilege is to speak God's truth into the lives of our children. To make him known so that our children see him, know him, love him and live for him.

Talk about how big God is. Everything and everyone in this world is only here because God spoke. His words are powerful. And he keeps this world going. Every breath we take, every step we take, every day we live is a gift given to us by God. He made us, knows us and loves us – completely. And he will never ever leave us. (Read Psalm 139:1-18 with your children).

Talk about our eternal hope in Jesus. In the midst of the pain and uncertainty of life remind children that only one thing is certain. Jesus came back to life! Only those who trust in him have a sure and certain future. Death has no sting for the Christian (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Our hope is not wishful thinking. But sure and certain. Children need the certainty that can only come through the gospel. But one thing we do know for sure: if we are in Christ, a rich welcome from God awaits us on the other side of death (2 Peter 1:11). Our life on the other side of death is free from suffering and pain, tears and fears. This is our sure and certain hope. (Why not memorize some of God's sure and certain promises as a family: John 3:16, Romans 10:9, Acts 2:21, Acts 10:43b).

Encourage children to talk: To talk about their fears; to ask their questions, and to share their feelings – their highs and their lows – as you journey as a family through these uncertain times. Sometimes we shut children down because we're afraid of the questions they might ask: *Did God make coronavirus?, Can God stop coronavirus?, Why doesn't God stop coronavirus?*

Don't soften answers to tough questions. Children are more robust than we think.

On the other hand, don't over answer questions. Keep your answers simple. Don't be afraid to say what you know and don't know. Talk with other parents, shepherds or ministers who may have insight into how to answer your child's question from Scripture. Our aim in answering their questions is to take them back to Jesus and the sure hope found only in him.

Share Simple COVID-19 Facts

Define what it is. COVID-19 is caused by a germ (virus) that can make the body sick. People who have COVID-19 may have a cough, fever and trouble taking deep breaths. But some people, especially kids, who have the virus may not feel sick at all or may have mild symptoms such as those of a cold.

Explain how it spreads. Most commonly, the virus that causes COVID-19 enters people's bodies when it's on their hands and they touch their mouths, noses or eyes. A virus is so tiny that you can't see it. This is why it's important to wash your hands often and try not to touch your mouth, nose or eyes.

Talk about what's being done. You're hearing so much about COVID-19 because it's a new illness that has not been seen before. Experts around the world are working hard every day to learn about COVID-19 and how to keep people safe.

Discuss How To Stay Safe

Take practical steps. Encourage frequent and proper hand-washing — especially when coming home, before meals, and after blowing the nose, coughing or sneezing. Show them how to sneeze or cough into a tissue and throw it in the trash or cough into a bent elbow. Clean and disinfect frequently touched items around the house.

Demonstrate effective hand-washing. Show your kids how to create tiny soap bubbles by rubbing their hands together and how to get the soap between fingers and all the way to the ends of their fingers, including their thumbs. Encourage your kids to sing the entire "Jesus Loves Me" song (about 20 seconds) so they spend the time they need to get their hands clean.

Stay home. As families stay home, explain to your kids how this can help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Let them know that when the risks of COVID-19 become much lower or go away, they can look forward to being back in their normal routine.

Practice social distancing. Avoid close contact with people outside of home, even if they don't appear to be sick. Pretend there's a bike between you and the person you're standing near, keeping about 6 feet apart from each other. Instead of giving high fives, fist bumps or hugs to people outside your family, give smiles and waves to say hello.

Don't forget ways to stay healthy. Healthy habits include eating a well-balanced diet, getting regular physical activity and getting a good night's sleep.

Helping Kids Cope

Pray with children. Prayer is not informing God. He already knows everything. Prayer is expressing our utter dependence on him. So, pray with your children. Model your dependency by praying out loud with them. Pray about your uncertainty and fears (age appropriately), your confidence that God is in control, your praise for the way you see him working for good, your desire to see people turn to him. We need to help our children mature in their prayerful dependence on their Father in heaven in everything. This only happens when we pray with them.

We have a God who can do the impossible. Nothing, not even a virus, is outside his control. Pray as a family to God who can do what for us seems impossible. As impossible as it seems that God will stop this growing pandemic, our world's biggest problem will always be hardened hearts. Pray big prayers with your children, that God will do the impossible and soften the hearts of people who have not turned to God.

Keep to a routine. Keep or create new family routines, such as learning activities, meal times, chores, relaxation and bedtimes. This structure helps kids predict what's planned,

allowing them to feel control in situations. Use a whiteboard or paper to display a daily schedule at home. Checking off tasks can encourage a sense of accomplishment.

Limit access to news. There may be times of constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media that may heighten fears about the disease. Limit reading, hearing or watching the news. Also limit social media use that may expose your kids to false information. Be cautious about discussing the news and your fears in front of your kids.

Be creative about ways to have fun. Encourage activities that your kids enjoy, such as puzzles, art projects, reading and music. Create opportunities for family time. Play games with your kids, have them join in on cooking projects and enjoy movie nights.

Enjoy virtual socializing. Connect with friends and family members using phone calls and FaceTime or similar apps. This can help to avoid feeling isolated and can build and maintain relationships.

Avoid placing blame. Be careful not to blame specific people, including those in a cultural, racial or ethnic group.

Remind children of the character of our great God. He is a God who takes care of those who cannot take care of themselves. The poor, the widow and the orphan. So as his people, we are to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.

Help children to think theologically about everything in life, even the washing of their hands. We wash our hands and practice safe distancing out of love for others.

Seek advice if necessary. If you notice persistent problems with sleep, changes in eating habits or difficulty concentrating on typical tasks, or if your kids have a persistent sense of hopelessness, excessive sadness or overwhelming worry, contact your doctor or a mental health professional for advice.

What if someone in my family is exposed to the coronavirus or diagnosed with COVID-19?

If your child gets sick, remind him or her that you or another caregiver will keep a close watch at all times. Reassure your child that you will be in close contact with your doctor who can give instructions on care and recovery.

If a family member gets sick and needs to be isolated at home or in the hospital, explain why this person needs to be away from the family at this time. Provide opportunities for your kids to stay in contact with the loved one.

Self-Care. Pay attention to your feelings and rely on loved ones, church family, or talk to a mental health professional. Maintain a healthy lifestyle. This will enable you to care for your kids and serve as a role model for how to cope.