

HOW TO ANSWER 7 BIG QUESTIONS KIDS HAVE ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

WILL I GET SICK? WILL MY PARENTS GET SICK? WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO?

These are probably the scariest questions on a lot of kids' minds right now. It's important not to minimize kids' fears or tell them there's no possibility they or their family will get sick, because unfortunately that's not true. What you can say is that you are doing everything you know of to make sure everyone in the family stays as healthy as possible and that, "if we get sick, then we're going to do everything we know how to do to make sure we get better again." You can also point to people in the community who are helping keep others safe and healthy. For example, parents can tell kids, "our doctors and our nurses are working really, really hard to make sure that everybody, if they do get sick, can get better again."



You can also emphasize the things your family is doing to stay as healthy as possible, like washing hands or avoiding social gatherings.

WHY DO I HAVE TO WASH MY HANDS SO MUCH?



One of the most important things people can do to protect themselves and others during this pandemic is washing hands frequently. But this can be hard to explain to little kids who might rather be playing or getting ready for snack time. For kids who are old enough to understand it's okay to tell children that we wash our hands because sometimes germs get on our hands, and if germs get on our hands and we don't get rid of them, they can make us sick. You can also say that it's even more important than usual to wash our hands because coronavirus is spreading rapidly, and washing our hands is one of the best ways we know to help keep ourselves safe.

Toddlers and preschoolers, however, may be too young to understand much about coronavirus or how germs work. For them, you can simply frame hand-washing as part of a family routine. You can say things like, "in our family, we always wash our hands because it helps us be healthy."

WHEN CAN I GO BACK TO SCHOOL?

If the schools are closed for too long, the parents are gonna find a vaccine before the scientists.

While some kids might be initially excited to get out of going to school, taking away school attendance means taking away something that's a constant in their lives and that can be distressing.

For school-aged kids asking when they can return to class, assure them that you are always staying up to date on when they may be able to start school again. But you can also explain that you as a parent as well as your child's school

want to make sure that when kids do go back everybody can stay healthy. In the meantime, you can help your child access whatever remote learning your district has set up, if you have the resources to do so.

WHY CAN'T I VISIT MY FRIENDS OR MY GRANDPARENTS?



Kids of all ages are understandably sad that they can't see a lot of friends or family members in person right now. The hard reality, according to many experts, is that we could be looking at social distancing recommendations for several months. To help kids cope with that, it's certainly important to show how they can keep in contact with grandparents and others through FaceTime or even letters, if they don't have access or don't use mobile devices. If grandparents or other

older relatives live nearby, kids may be able to "visit" them by dropping off groceries or other necessities and waving hello through a window.

Meanwhile, you can also tell kids that the safer that we are, the more careful we are, the sooner we're going to get to see people. That doesn't mean that practicing good social distancing today will mean you'll get to see your friends tomorrow, but it does mean you can help more people — including those you love the most — stay safe while scientists work on treatments and vaccines.

IF MY PARENTS ARE HOME, WHY DO THEY HAVE TO WORK INSTEAD OF PLAYING WITH ME?

WORKING FROM HOME

Day One: This is going to be great! I can bond with my kid and work in comfortable clothes.

Day Two:

@chiarilli_family_chaos



Many workers in this country don't have the option to work from home right now, and a staggering number have been laid off or had their hours cut. But for those who are able to work remotely right now, many are being asked to do so. And if you have young kids, that often means trying to get something done while your child asks increasingly plaintively why you're on the phone or computer instead of playing blocks.

In that situation you can explain, "I'm home with you to make sure that our family stays healthy and well," but that you still have to work. Then, you can let your child know when you might be available to take a break and play with them, perhaps even setting a timer so they can see how long they have until they can get your full attention. In the meantime give your child an activity, whether it's a puzzle or *Paw Patrol*, so they know they have something to do while they wait.

I'M NOT SICK, SO WHY DO I HAVE TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS?



This one may apply especially to teenagers and older kids, who may feel a certain adolescent invincibility even in the face of a virus that has many people scared. That could be compounded by reports that the illness is less severe in children and young people.

For teenagers who don't understand why they have to take precautions, explain that even if a kid doesn't get sick, they can pass the virus along to other people — including loved ones — who could become very ill. When it comes to social distancing, hand-washing, and other safety measures during this time, we all have to think about who are we doing this for and that can include grandparents, people in the community with underlying conditions that put them at higher risk, health care workers saving lives, and everyone in the country and the world who benefits from efforts to “flatten the curve.”

Meanwhile, even if they act invincible, teens may be having a lot of conflicting feelings right now. Adolescents vacillate a lot between feeling very powerful and feeling very powerless. There are a lot of teens who are going to complain about being home with their parents, and that's real, but they're also scared. Parents can help them talk through their fears and recognize that being home is an important anchor for them sometimes, while also supporting ways that teenagers can still connect with each other, whether it's playing online games or mobilizing around a social cause.

HOW CAN I HELP?

For kids who are old enough to understand, this is a time to talk about collective responsibility for our families and all of society. This is an opportunity for a family to develop a civic identity and parents can teach kids that part of that identity is taking care of people who are vulnerable.

That can take a lot of forms, whether it's delivering groceries to a grandparent, donating to support service workers who may be out of work at this time (if a family has the financial means to do so). Overall this is a time when parents can teach kids that each one of us is responsible for all of us both within a family and around the world.



Adapted from [How to Answer 7 big questions that kids have about the corona virus pandemic](#)