



## Talking to Children and Young People about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Advice for Parents and Schools

- Children and young people need factual, age appropriate information about the virus and concrete instruction about how to avoid spreading of the virus. Without the facts, they often imagine situations far worse than reality. See <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>
- Let the child/young person's questions and their age guide as to how much information to provide:
  - Very **young children** need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe and that the people they care about are safe. They may ask *Will I get sick? Will granny/grandad die?*
  - Reassure them that the Government is working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy.
  - Explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with the virus.
  - Tell them that not everyone will get the virus and that the vast majority who get it recover fully.
  - **Older children** may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy. Either provide or direct them to where they can find accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.
- Children can feel less anxious and more in control when given guidance on what they can do to prevent infection. Give them this information. Further information is available [here](#).
- The posters overleaf are available at this link. There is also a link to a video the Deputy Chief Medical Officer answered some common questions for RTÉ Junior's News 2Day programme [here](#):



- Children and young people look to the adults in their lives to guide them on how to react to worrying and stressful events. If the adults in their lives seem overly worried, their own anxiety may rise.
  - If they are anxious, let them talk about their feelings and guide them in reframing their thoughts and concerns to a more helpful way of thinking.
  - Give them extra attention and time, to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
  - Remember they do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes etc.
  - It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing and then come back with further questions.
- Reassure children and young people that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may be based on rumours and inaccurate information.
    - Remember factual information about the virus can help reduce anxiety.
    - Avoid constantly monitoring or discussing updates on the status of COVID -19, as this can increase anxiety.
    - Try to limit their access to information on the internet/television/social media that might be upsetting to them.
    - Remind children/young people that no individual or group is 'responsible' for the virus.
    - Remind them that they should not make negative comments about others in relation to the virus.
    - Challenge any negative comments they make or any stereotyping. Explain what negative comments mean if they are different to your values.
  - Encourage children/young people to continue with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem upset or overwhelmed.
  - Maintain a normal routine as much as possible, keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring.