We are living through unprecedented times that challenge our current way of life. This situation is particularly hard on youth, who may need special attention from you. This sheet presents tips to help you talk with the youth in your lives about COVID-19.

**How to Talk to Youth About COVID-19**

Create the space to listen, discuss, and provide guidance.

Look at these conversations as opportunities to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. Be honest and realistic about the challenges we face, but don’t overwhelm youth with negativity. Try to find positive stories to share as well.

Let youth drive the conversation.

Invite youth to tell you what they know and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It’s okay if you can’t answer everything; being available is what matters.

Provide information that is honest and accurate.

Talk to youth about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information. Provide accessible alternatives for them to engage.

Ensure the information you provide is appropriate for their age and developmental level.

**Primary School**

Discuss the different feelings they may be experiencing and explain that these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.

Focus on good health behaviors, such as covering coughs and washing hands.

Use materials like NPR’s comic to help younger youth understand basic concepts of disease prevention.

**Middle School**

Youth this age will be more interested in what might happen in the future. Stick to the facts and don’t burden them with your own anxiety about uncertain scenarios.

Some youth may act out scared feelings through misbehavior. Others may become more withdrawn. Pay attention to these cues.

**High School**

Encourage youth to confront and prevent stigma. Discuss the reactions they may experience around discrimination.

Incorporate relevant health education into other subjects like science and social studies.

Have youth think about how they can engage with social media to think critically and share their perspective.

**What Are the Experts Saying?**

**High School**

Pandemics have always been accompanied by heightened levels of racism and xenophobia. Youth hear racist information from a wide variety of places; it is critical to confront and challenge these responses whenever possible.

Know What Your Youth Are Hearing, understand the Historical Context of racialized public health events, Interrupt Racism if you witness it, Educate Students for when you aren’t around.

**Emphasize health, safety, and the importance of good hygiene.**

It’s important to explain that changes like school closures and social distancing are happening in effort to keep them safe and healthy.

Give youth concrete actions they can reasonably take. Jamie Howard, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, notes, “Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe.”

**Be calm and process your own anxiety first.**

Youth look to you, as an adult, for examples of how to behave. Make sure to process your own fears before you talk to youth.
How to Talk to Youth About COVID-19

Watch for Changes in Behavior

- Problems with sleep
- The need for excessive reassurance
- Separation anxiety
- Repetitive behaviors (such as excessive hand-washing)
- More tears or anger than usual

Strategies to Help Youth Cope with Anxiety

Allow youth time daily to vent.
Give youth space to release their emotions due to everything they might be taking in on social media. This needn't be long, may be five, ten or fifteen minutes.

Help youth focus on what is going right.
Show them good things happening in the world.

Encourage connection.
Youth need to stay connected. Social media is a good thing right now, in that they can continue to talk to their friends, share their concerns with their peers, and know they're not alone.

Give youth a sense of control.
Be mindful of understanding that the world has changed as they know it and they need to feel a sense of control, as we all do, in order to feel safe.

Resources

General Resources


Age and Developmentally Appropriate


Combating Xenophobia and Racism


Find more COVID-19 related resources for nonprofits at https://www.youthinc-usa.org/