

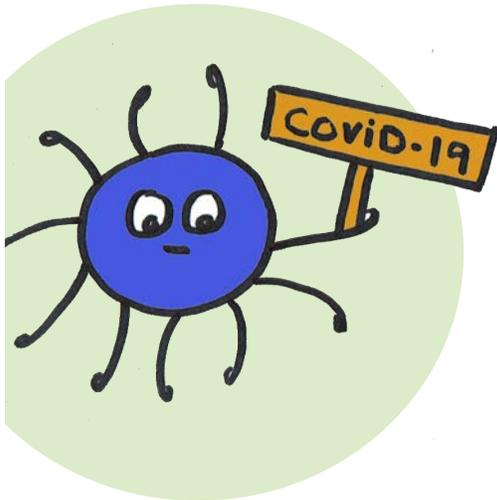
TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19: COPING WITH ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

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We are currently confronted collectively to important repercussions due to the propagation of the COVID-19. We have to explain to our children why the school is closed; why their sports tournaments, the presentation of their shows, and so many other activities are cancelled; why can't they go to the trampoline center or to cinema; why was the pizza delivery guy wearing a mask; why do people constantly talk about the virus on the radio?



How to explain COVID-19 to my child?



1. Explain

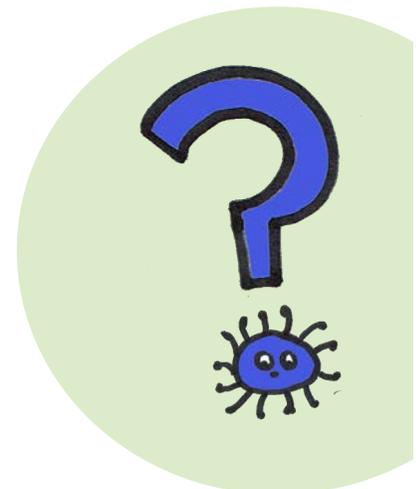
Explain that « there is a new virus, like the one of influenza. But there is no vaccine yet to prevent us from being sick if we catch the virus, because we don't know it well enough for now. What is positive though, contrary to the usual influenza, is that we are able to restrain its influence if we can stop it from going everywhere. »

Explain that the goal of the actual recommendations is to prevent the propagation of the virus, in order to protect more vulnerable people.

2. Reassure and put it into perspective

What children hear about the current situation can trigger fears with respect to their integrity and the one of their close others ("Will I be sick? And daddy? Do people die because of this virus?").

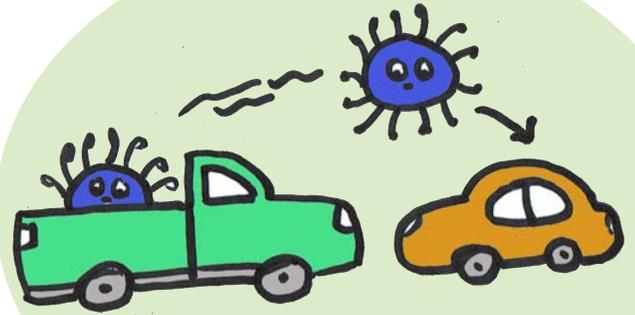
The child may need to be reassured: S/He is not in danger, and neither are their parents, brothers, and sisters, because they are in good health. But there are more fragile people than them, such as people who already had health problems or important difficulties in their body.



3. Picturing

Explain how this virus spreads and why we implement certain precautions for more fragile people. Use images and metaphors, adapted to the child's age.

« It is like if we were little cars that may carry the virus from one car to another.



If your car is in good shape, you will just carry it in your car trunk. Sometimes you won't even realize that you are carrying it.

If your car is more used and another car gives you the virus, then it could cause damages to your car. Your car may break down and you will have to bring it to the garage.



So, garages could receive many used cars to repair all at once, and have a hard time repairing them all at the same time.”



4. Give back a sense of control

The current situation triggers feelings of powerlessness. To face it, it is reassuring to give back a sense of control to the child and **emphasize the way each person can help.**

“Your school is closed in an effort to stop the virus being carried in too many cars. It is the way that your school principal found to help. The dance show you were preparing has been cancelled for the same reason. It is how your professor can help. Even researchers work hard at the current moment to develop treatments (vaccines), so that fewer cars carry the virus and need to go to the garage.”

“We too can help in different ways. For example by carefully washing our hands. When we wash carefully our car, it is clean afterward and it no longer carries the virus.”

ADDITIONAL TOOLS



We have to expect various emotional reactions, not only anxiety. For instance, under angry or irritable reactions can hide feelings of anxiety or insecurity.



Follow the pace of the child. The child is ready to receive the answers to the questions s/he is asking, without going further.

« Grandpa is older, and his health problems make him more fragile. His car is more used, but everyone around him tries to avoid giving him the virus in his car. This is also why garages exist, to repair used cars.»



Avoid transmitting our own adults fears

Making the distinction between our adults fears (powerlessness, worries about logistics, or catastrophic scenarios) and those of our children (significant change in routines, loss of anchors) allows us to be more attentive to their true needs. Do not hesitate to consult a professional psychological resource if needed.



Offer a secure space to children so that they can feel comfortable expressing their emotions and questions.



Use explanations and words adapted to the age of the child.



Accompany the child in a playful manner

Ex. Sing an amusing song during the 20 seconds during which children wash their hands and practice this task in family.



Limit the exposition of the child to the medias and to adult conversations about the situation. The child who is playing next to us absorbs much of adults' discussion and emotional charge.