

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN

A COMMUNICATION GUIDE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Resources for Early Childhood (Infant - 4 Years)

COMMUNICATION
BEST PRACTICES

TALKING POINTS

QUESTIONS &
ANSWERS

VISUAL
RESOURCES

ACTIVITIES



National Center for
Disaster Preparedness

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Children's
Health Fund

table of contents

2	overview communication best practices
3	talking points
8	question & answer quick reference
9	visual resource compendium
12	activities
13	glossary



Visit <https://bit.ly/ncdp-gd-3> to access communication guides for:

- Early Childhood (Infant - 4 Years)
- School-Age Children (5 - 11 Years)
- Teens (12-19 Years)

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Note: Web-based resources were live during the time of this guide's publication, but cannot be guaranteed to be active in the future.



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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

overview

The global pandemic caused by the coronavirus has placed an undue burden on caregivers and health care providers across the globe. With a growing number of resources that have been rapidly created to navigate significant uncertainty, this document aims to serve as an age-appropriate comprehensive communication guide for health care providers to share key principles to help promote healthy behaviors to reduce the impact of COVID-19 throughout their community.

communication best practices

Infants and toddlers (i.e. under age 3) will not have a language-based understanding of the coronavirus, but can sense if a caregiver is worried, sad, or upset. They cannot yet describe their feelings with words but might be more fussy or show changes in behavior. Preschoolers (3-4 years) usually understand basic ideas about germs and being sick. For all ages, efforts should be made to ensure caregivers are well-informed on good household hygiene and social behaviors throughout the duration of the pandemic.

In general, when communicating with young children, use these general principles:

- Use loving tones and simple language
- Emphasize that they are loved and safe
- Express understanding of their emotions and fears
- Use repetition when reinforcing good behaviors such as teaching handwashing and good hygiene
- Promote reading, singing, and interactive play

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

talking points

The table below is a compilation of key health promotion-based actions which a provider may want to reinforce during a patient-provider encounter. These actions, which may be specific to a child or their caregiver, are supplemented with evidence-based guiding principles followed by example statements. These statements are intended to be directed to the patient or caregiver and can be used “as is” or adjusted to fit the provider’s communication style or the specific needs of their clients.

Action	Guiding Principles	Example Statements
Promote good hygiene	<p>Children should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds before and after meals, after they go to the bathroom, after they come in from outside, after they blow their nose, cough, or sneeze, and after touching pets.</p> <p>If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Don’t use baby wipes. Caregivers should safely store hand sanitizer out of reach of children as even a small amount can cause alcohol poisoning.</p> <p>Use facts to explain why consistent handwashing and good hygiene prevents the spread of any germ.</p> <p>Caregivers should be encouraged to follow the same hygiene advice to ensure they are limiting the spread of the virus while demonstrating good practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are so tiny you can’t see them. When they get inside your body, they can make you sick.● Lots of hand washing will keep you strong and healthy.● Sneeze or cough into your elbow and it will help keep your friends and family safe.● [For caregivers to direct to child]: Let’s sing the Happy Birthday song while we wash our hands!● [For caregivers to direct to child]: Let’s try these five fun and easy steps for washing our hands—wet, lather, scrub, rinse, and dry!

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

Normalize the use of masks

Children over the age of 2 should wear a cloth face mask to cover their nose and mouth anytime they are in a public space. If the child complains about the mask being hot and uncomfortable, it can be loosened but must be kept on. **Note: All children should be able to show their caregiver that they are able to safely and easily remove a mask.**

Children under the age of 2 should NOT wear a mask.

Cloth face coverings should be washed daily after use. Surgical masks should not be washed.

Wearing masks might be frightening to young children, so explain to them in simple terms the importance of masks and encourage caregivers to practice using them with their child before leaving the house.

Household members should model mask use to normalize their presence in public spaces.

- ① You might see people wearing masks. That's because they help stop the germs. You'll get to wear one too!
- ① I know it might be scary to wear a mask, but everyone is wearing them now to stop the germs. You can have fun making them at home!
- ① Wearing a mask is a kind action we can do for each other.
- ① **[For caregivers]:** Here are some tips for making mask wearing more fun and relatable for children:
 - Put a cloth face covering on a favorite stuffed animal
 - Decorate masks so they are more personal and fun
 - Show your child pictures of other children wearing masks
 - Have them draw a mask on their favorite book character
 - Practice wearing the face covering at home to help your child get used to it
 - Look in the mirror together with the face coverings on and talk about it

Encourage routine

Young children need a predictable and stable environment. Caregivers should promote a routine for daytime and nighttime. They should maintain a consistent schedule with bedtimes, meals, and exercise or outdoor activity.

Caregivers can redirect children to indoor activities such as playing with cups and water in the sink or tub with supervision or have them help prepare a meal by washing vegetables or mixing ingredients that aren't hot.

- ① I know you don't like that you can't visit your friends but it will be so much fun when you can again!
- ① **[For caregivers to direct to child]:** It's time to read for 20 minutes and then we can play <insert child's favorite game or activity>.
- ① **[For caregivers]:** A regular schedule for your child can improve their sleep at night and a structure provides stability and predictability for you and your child. It also will help improve their overall behavior and ultimately their health.

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

Share an appropriate level of information

Honest answers to a child's questions are important but should be given with an appropriate level of detail. Too much information, or scary-sounding answers may cause unnecessary fear or anxiety for the child. If they haven't asked any questions about the virus, it may be best to not bring up in conversation

Caregivers should monitor unsupervised TV use and turn off the news when kids are around.

Provide support to caregivers

Children can sense when family members are stressed or worried. Caregivers should be encouraged to take care of their physical and mental health.

Caregivers should model calmness about coronavirus to limit anxiety and concerns among children and should minimize the amount of news they see and hear.

Providers are encouraged to check in with caregivers to see how they are coping and provide self-care instructions.

Value safe social and family interaction

Children at this age benefit from interactions with other children and family members. However, there is still uncertainty when the reach of the virus will decrease. In-person activities should be minimized and adults and family who do not live together should continue to use masks. Virtual gatherings can be built into family routine for family or friends who live far away.

See "Normalize the Use of Masks " above for mask guidance for young children.

- Some people have been getting sick. We are all staying home right now because we want to stay healthy.
- Some people may look funny in a mask but it protects me and you.
- Lots of doctors and nurses are working hard to protect you every day.
- **[For caregivers]:** This is a stressful time for everyone. Your health is important for the health of <child name>. Here are some resources that may be useful. *Providers should direct caregivers to resources "for caregivers" in the Visual Resource Compendium
- **[For caregivers]:** Going for a walk, dancing with your child, making funny faces, are good for you both.
- **[For caregivers]:** It's important for you to get enough sleep and eat regular healthy meals.
- Sometimes people may look funny with a mask on but their mask protects me and you from getting sick, and our mask prevents them from getting sick.
- I know you really want to visit with grandma and grandpa this summer but they are excited to see you on the computer!
- Why don't you and <caregiver name> call <relative name (e.g. grandma and grandpa)>! You could draw them a picture or write them an email about your day. Or you can send them a picture of you and your book or stuffed animal.

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

Observe changes in behavior

Uncertainty and concern about the virus can make children feel anxious. Look for cues that the child is anxious—they may be scared to be alone or leave the house, clingy, irritable, extra weepy, or have trouble sleeping.

If the child is showing behavior change, caregivers should offer extra support and reassurance.

Caregivers should talk to their physician or mental health provider if there are significant changes in behavior or if they are not sure.

- The doctors and nurses are working to protect you. Your family loves and cares about you very much.
- **[For caregivers]:** Express support for your child and remind them that their family and friends love them.

Adjust messaging for needs of children with disabilities, access, and functional needs

Providers and caregivers should keep responses and messages to the child's developmental level or abilities, rather than their physical ability or ages.

Children who are considered high-risk or severely immunocompromised are encouraged to wear an N95 mask for protection. Consult the American Academy of Pediatrics for latest guidance.

Family members of children at higher risk are encouraged to use a standard surgical mask if they are sick to prevent the spread of illness to others.

Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments may have a hard time tolerating a cloth face covering. For these children, special precautions may be needed.

- **[For caregivers]:** Depending on your child's developmental level, it may be best to not directly talk about the virus but continue to show and promote good hygiene.

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

Acknowledge the changing information about the virus

Caregivers should know that information about coronavirus will continue to change over the next 12-18 months, or more. Encourage use of known sources of information such as the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics via HealthyChildren.org.

Address domestic violence or abuse

The pandemic has limited visibility of children to many other mandatory reporters besides healthcare workers. If violence or abuse is suspected in the household, it should be addressed by the provider.

Caregivers may be experiencing more stress than normal right now. That stress may be taken out on a child in the household or between other family members. Providers can help reinforce coping and self-regulation methods which will in turn benefit children in the household.

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or child protectives services.

- Doctors are working hard to find out how to help people who are sick. You are helping by washing your hands and wearing masks.
- **[For caregivers]:** There is still a lot we don't know about the virus and whether or not children can spread the virus or may be at risk for other types of sicknesses as a result. Stay in contact with your health care providers on a regular basis.
- **[For caregivers]:** If you feel like you are getting angry and might lose control, try the following:
 - Take a deep breath and count to 10.
 - If the child is crying, place them in a safe place, leave the room, and let the child cry alone for about 10 to 15 minutes.
 - Call someone close to you for emotional support.
 - Be patient. Even if you feel frustrated, stay in control and handle the child with care.
 - Call your child's doctor if you need additional assistance or you suspect your child may need medical attention.
 - And if you are having consistent trouble coping or managing your emotions, try contacting a mental health provider. <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/> has some great resources including a hotline.
- **[For caregivers]:** If you are affected by abuse in your home and need support or someone to talk to, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or if you're unable to speak safely, you can log onto thehotline.org or text LOVEIS to 1-866-331-9474.

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

question & answer quick reference

It is likely that many providers will hear the same questions, or slight variations of, from multiple patients or their caregivers. The questions listed below represent some anticipated questions along with a simple response to be directed to a child.

What is Coronavirus?

Coronavirus is a germ that can make people sick. The germs are so tiny we can't see them, but they can travel through the air when people sneeze and cough.

Will I get sick?

Everybody gets sick sometimes but children and healthy adults are very good at fighting germs like coronavirus. If you do get sick, the adults that care for you will keep you safe. You'll rest and watch some TV until you feel better.

Why can't I see grandma and grandpa?

Sometimes, germs can make grandparents sicker and we want everyone to stay healthy. They still love and care for you very much and you can still talk to them on the phone or computer!

Why can't we leave the house?

Families need to stay home for a little while right now to keep us and our friends healthy. I know you want to play with your friends but there are a lot of fun things you and your family can do at home!
(Provider can refer children and caregivers to the "Activities" in the Visual Resource Compendium)

Why can't I go to child care/school? Why can't I play with my friends?

We can protect ourselves and other people from getting sick by staying away from each other because the virus can't travel very far. You're being a hero by staying home, so we can all stay healthy.

Why are people wearing masks?

Wearing a mask is a kind action we do for each other. Sometimes people may look funny with a mask on but their mask protects me and you from getting sick, and our mask prevents them from getting sick.

covid-19 and children

RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

visual resource compendium

The resource list below has been organized by topic and includes the type (e.g. web-based, video, print), direct url, and source. These resources can be utilized in the client encounter or as takeaways for caregivers.

What is Coronavirus?

The Coronavirus Explained to Children | VIDEO 🎥

This short and simple video animation explains what coronavirus is, how it spreads, and how children can protect themselves (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVvVTDhGqaA>

Source: Eurac Research

What is Coronavirus? An Explainer for Children | VIDEO 🎥

This video explanation teaches young children what coronavirus is and how to keep themselves and others safe (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqaXBtSaiUE>

Source: Ineqe Safeguarding Group

Washing hands

Handwashing Visual Guide by Save the Children (all ages) | PRINTABLE 📄

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Wash-Your-Hands.pdf>

Source: Save the Children

CDC Wash Your Hands! | PRINTABLE 📄

This is a simple graphic on the steps of handwashing, produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and relevant for all ages.

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/wash-your-hands-steps-8x11.pdf>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Wearing masks

Wearing a Mask | PRINTABLE 📄

This story teaches children why and when to wear masks and can help younger children overcome the idea that masks are uncomfortable or scary (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://familiesstogetherinc.org/forms/covid-19/WearingAMaskStoryforChildren.pdf>

Source: Families Together, Inc.

covid-19 and children

RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

Social & physical distancing

Sesame Street: Practicing Social Distancing with Abby and Rudy | VIDEO 🎥

In this Sesame Street short, Abby and Rudy show how they have virtual playdates and find fun at-home activities (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsScsu_s8FY

Source: Sesame Street

Time to Come In, Bear | VIDEO 🎥

This is an animated story for younger children on social distancing (early childhood to young school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA_SsZFYw0w

Source: Kim St. Lawrence, Children's Author

Two Meters Away – Social Distancing Song for Kids | VIDEO 🎥

This song for children teaches about coronavirus and social distancing (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LIST: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nQgTywKmvQ>

Source: Hopster

Storybooks about COVID-19

COVIBOOK | PRINTABLE 📄

An informative and interactive storybook to support and reassure children under the age of 7. Available in 25 languages.

RESOURCE LINK: https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

Source: MindHeart

My Hero is You | PRINTABLE 📄

This is a storybook available in over 100 languages for children around the world by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to be read by a parent, caregiver, or teacher (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/My%20Hero%20is%20You%2C%20Storybook%20for%20Children%20on%20COVID-19.pdf>

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/my-hero-you>

Source: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

King COVID and the Kids Who Cared | PRINTABLE 📄

A storybook about COVID-19, prevention, and caring for others (early childhood to school age).

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.autismresourcecentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/king_covid_and_the_kids_who_cared_abridged_1.pdf

Source: Autism Resource Central

The Unwelcome Stranger, COVID-19 | WEB-BASED 🖥️ PRINTABLE 📄

A storybook available in 11 languages by Pangea Publishing to provide important public health information through a narrative that empowers caregivers to discuss this subject with their children. The book also includes project-based learning activities (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.pangeaeducation.org/the-unwelcome-stranger>

Source: Pangea Education

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

For
caregivers

Keep Calm and Manage Stress | PRINTABLE

A 5-step guide for caregivers on managing stress during COVID-19.

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-5-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=1b3ee706_6

Source: World Health Organization

Coping with Stress During COVID-19 | PRINTABLE

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_8

Source: World Health Organization

Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety | WEB-BASED

A compilation of research-backed and helpful tools (articles, meditations, access to mental health experts, anxiety screenings, and more).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.virusanxiety.com/>

Sources: Shine and Mental Health America

For providers

Coping with Stress | WEB-BASED

Guidance on how to cope with stress and take care of your mental health.

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Healthcare Personnel and First Responders: How to Cope with Stress and Build Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic | WEB-BASED

Guidance and resources for providers.

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mental-health-healthcare.html>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Managing Mental Health During COVID-19 | PRINTABLE

Mental and behavioral health guidance and resources for physicians and other frontline health care professionals.

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/managing-mental-health-during-covid-19>

Source: American Medical Association

Guide to Mental Health Resources for COVID-19 for Health Care Providers | WEB-BASED

A compilation of resources and videos with practical recommendations and strategies to alleviate the mental health concerns of health care workers.

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/guide-to-mental-health-resources/health-care-providers>

Source: Massachusetts General Hospital

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RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

activities

The activities listed here can be provided to children and their caregivers to help reduce stress at home by giving children educational and stimulating activities to build into a daily routine throughout the pandemic.

The 2020 COVID-19 Family Guidebook | PRINTABLE

Activities to help children, teens, adults, and grandparents deal with feelings and changes during the coronavirus pandemic – over 200 games and fun ideas for interactive activities while social distancing (all ages).

RESOURCE LINK: https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/covid-19/covid19-family-guidebook-full---4112020.pdf?sfvrsn=62848a4d_0

Source: Association of Child Life Professionals

Week-by-Week Schedules to Help Plan At-Home Lessons and Activities for Kids in Grades Pre-K through 6 | PRINTABLE

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/resources/weekly-schedules-at-home-learning-grades-pre-k-6>

Source: Save the Children

Relaxation Activities to Do at Home with Kids | PRINTABLE

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/resources/easy-at-home-relaxation-activities-to-help-calm-kids>

Source: Save the Children

10 Family Learning Activities | PRINTABLE

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/emergency-response/10-family-learning-activities.pdf>

Source: Save the Children

Free Educational Websites and Apps | WEB-BASED

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/emergency-response/educational-websites-and-apps.pdf>

Source: Save the Children

PBS Kids Daily Activities | WEB-BASED

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/pbskidsdaily?source=pbsparents>

Source: PBS Kids

Active for Life: Physical Activity Ideas for All Ages | WEB-BASED

RESOURCE LINK: <https://activeforlife.com/activities/>

Source: Active for Life

covid-19 and children

RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (INFANT TO 4 YEARS)

The Play at Home Playbook | PRINTABLE

Various games to keep children active at home (early childhood to school-age).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.playworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Play-At-Home-Playbook-3.27.20.pdf>

Source: Playworks

Online Activity Round-Up | WEB-BASED

Online activities, educational puzzlers, and games (ages 3-13).

RESOURCE LINK: <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/kids-activities-and-printables/activities-for-kids/online-activity-round.html>

glossary

The definitions listed in this table have been adapted for the intended audience and context of this document.

PROVIDER	▶ An individual that provides any type of health service (e.g. physician, nurse, dentist, mental health worker, social worker).		
CAREGIVER	▶ A parent or guardian with a primary responsibility to take care of a child (e.g. parent, relative, foster parent, legal guardian). Caregivers may also be temporary in nature but still hold significant responsibility.	HOUSEHOLD	▶ One or more persons living in the same home. This may be a single family, blended family, or another group of people (e.g. roommates).
GUARDIAN	▶ A person who looks after and is legally responsible to care for someone else. Guardian is typically used as an alternative for “parent”.	IMMUNO-COMPROMISED	▶ Someone with a weakened immune system and reduced ability to fight infections and other diseases.
CORONAVIRUS	▶ A type of common virus that infects humans named after its crown-like spikes on the viral particle. There are several different types of coronaviruses, one of which is the novel coronavirus (nCOV-19) identified in 2019 in Wuhan, China.	MANDATORY REPORTER	▶ A person who, because of their profession (e.g. health care workers, child care providers, social workers, mental health providers, law enforcement), is legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect.
COVID-19	▶ The newly identified respiratory disease, or illness, caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2).	STIGMATIZE	▶ To disapprove of a person or treat someone unfairly, based on perceived social characteristics commonly related to culture, gender, race, intelligence, and health status.
SOCIAL/PHYSICAL DISTANCING	▶ Maintaining physical space between people not of your household and reducing the number of times people come into close contact with one another to avoid spreading the coronavirus. General guidelines for physical distancing include limiting gatherings of 10 or more people and maintaining 6 feet of space.	COPING STRATEGIES	▶ Specific efforts made to adapt to, manage, or minimize stressful life events.
HYGIENE	▶ Any practices that you do to keep yourself and	[]	▶ Square brackets are used in the “Example Statements” to specify to whom the statements should be directed. If there are no brackets, the statement is intended to be directed to a child.
		< >	▶ Angle brackets are used to indicate that a name or other custom content should be inserted into the statement.