



How to Talk to Kids about School Closure

News and updates about the coronavirus have been flooding the media, our inboxes, and conversations. This has been an unexpected health crisis that is without a doubt impacting all of us. Students will wonder and likely ask questions about why school is closed at this time. Take a seat, a deep breath, and focus on creating calm, stability, and reassurance; do your best to find time to share, listen, and ask (and answer) questions. Talking about it in simple, developmentally appropriate ways can help reduce anxiety so children can redirect their full attention to other activities. With that, there are things we can all do to regain a sense of control during these unprecedented times. You may consider the following talking points when speaking with your kids:

- You can talk about reasons why we might take a sick day from school or work.
- Explain that school is closed so we can all take some time to take care of ourselves.
- Some people may be feeling sick and may be unwell. They can use this time to get the care they need to feel better.
- By staying home, this helps reduce the chances of other people getting sick.
- We are finding creative ways to keep our learning going.
- Teachers will be providing lessons that you can do at home.
- You are loved, we are a family, a community, and we can handle this challenge.

Other things that may help re-establish a new, but temporary norm is to maintain some routines during this transition. Consider having 3-5 tasks that your child does every morning (ex: make bed, 7 minute yoga/workout/meditation, fold towels), mid-day (assigned classwork), and afternoon (ex: walk with parent or caregiver, reading, set dinner table). There are a lot of resources out there to support these types of sensitive conversations with our kids. Below is additional information previously distributed that you may find helpful.

If you would like more support at any time during this change, please feel free to reach out to one of us. My email is shannon@presidiohill.org. Stay tuned for more information from administration and teachers about ways in which we will stay connected and keep our learning and relationships going as we come together through these changes.



Supporting Students at School (COVID-19)

Q & A's

What is Coronavirus?

It is a virus that carries a disease that can make people sick.

Who is affected?

Some adults and older people have been affected. Very few kids have been affected at this time. The kids who have been affected have had symptoms similar to a cold or flu, then they got better.

Should I worry?

The adults at home and at school are working with health professionals to help people stay healthy and safe. We are all here to take care of you.

What can I do?

What you should do is make sure to wash your hands often and avoid touching your face if your hands aren't clean. Also, try not to pick your nose! If you are sick, stay home and get care from your parents and your doctor.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water (count to 20 while washing)
- Wash before you eat and after you play or go to the bathroom
- Sneeze into your elbows
- Eat healthy and get enough sleep to help your immune system stay strong
- Avoid touching your face (germs can get into your body through your nose and mouth)

What can others do?

If anyone feels sick or has any flu-like symptoms, they should get help from a doctor.



Strategies for Parents Supporting Children (COVID-19)

Stay Calm. Do your best to stay calm and avoid being unnecessarily reactive. Be a good role model for handling challenging situations. “During upsetting times, kids are emotionally safest if they believe that their adults are calm and in charge (*Kidpower*).” Anxiety is contagious. Remember to care for yourself so you are able to have a calm and controlled presence when communicating and caring for your child.

Offer Extra Support and Reassurance. Kids often benefit from extra time, hugs, and reassurance during times of transition. If your evening ritual is to read together before bed, continuing this daily practice (and possibly extending it a little) can be stabilizing. Extra verbal reassurances such as extra “I love you’s” and reminders about when they will see you again, “I will pick you up after school” can help, too.

Limit Exposure. Take charge of what your child is exposed to on television, in the media, and online. Do your best to prevent children from being bombarded by news that might be traumatizing or scary for them. Try to have conversations that may be perceived as distressing away from children.

Offer Age-Appropriate Explanations. Offer basic information about how you will help your family stay safe and healthy, as well as basic, age appropriate explanations about events that may impact them. “This is hard for the people who have been impacted and lots of people are working hard to help people stay healthy and safe.” Statements such as these can be modified based on the age and stage of the child. You may decide to describe some specific safety and response measures that are in place in an age-appropriate way.

Allow Children to Express Feelings. Allow time and space for your child to express their feelings, without feeling like they need to take care of the adults feelings. Keep in mind that kids absorb and often take on our feelings. Sometimes we (adults) have big reactions to events that are occurring in our lives, in our community, and in the media. In response, focus on what you are doing to help your family stay safe. Sometimes this is just a reminder that we will still have our daily routines and I will still be tucking you in bed each night and reading our favorite book together (reminders that the parent(s) have control so the child can minimize worry).

Be Aware of Behavioral Changes. If your child starts to complain of tummy aches or headaches, first rule out any health concerns, then consider that they may be somatizing their experience, feeling and experiencing anxiety in their body. If you suspect this is happening, start with the basics: Strengthen daily routines (morning, evening, bed routines), limit exposure to anything distressing including adult conversations, prioritize healthy meals



together (offers time to connect), offer support and reassurance, and reach out for help if needed.

Give Children Positive Ways to Feel In Control. As much as possible, try to keep daily routines as consistent as possible. This helps children feel in control. You can give them more opportunities to feel in control by offering choices and additional responsibilities. This can be as simple as asking what they would like for dinner, spaghetti or chicken and salad. Other examples: “What movie should we watch on family movie night this week (narrow down choices)?”; “Should we walk or drive to school today?”; “On Saturday would you rather go on a bike ride, or, have a playdate?”

Resources:

[Talk with your Kids about the Coronavirus \(Child Mind Institute\)](#)

[A Comic for Kids Exploring the Coronavirus \(NPR\)](#)

[Difficult Conversations: What to say when the News is Scary to Kids \(NPR\)](#)

[Talking to Children about COVID-19, A Parent Resource \(NASP\)](#)

[A Guide to Keeping your Child Safe and Reassured \(CNN\)](#)

[CDC: Resources for Households](#)