

# Helping Kids Who Are Worried About Coronavirus

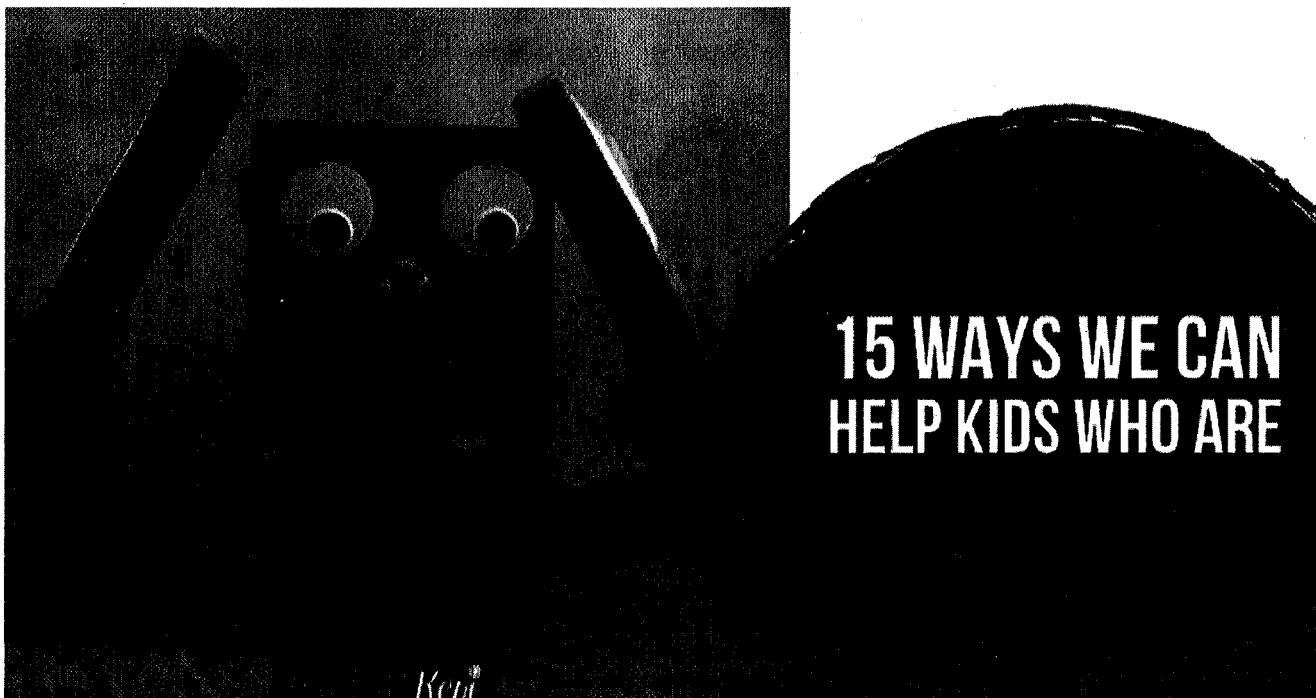
MARCH 14, 2020

Spread the word:

0 Shares

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Email](#)
- [More](#)

This afternoon, my typically level-headed, kind 5-year-old screamed some pretty unkind words at his 3-year-old brother. My knee jerk reaction was to call him out but instead, I pulled him aside and asked him how he was feeling. He was immediately in a puddle and spewed some worries about getting Coronavirus. Many of our kids have been hearing about COVID-19 for weeks at school, from friends, on the news, and at home, and while they might not know how to appropriately express their feelings about the situation, they might be holding on to some pretty strong worries. While some schools are closing, kids are out of their comfortable routines, which can contribute to those worries (sidenote: this is a collection of **free** printable activities, downloads, and guides you can use at home to help your kids with those worries). Here are 15 things we can do to talk to kids about Coronavirus and help them manage these big worries they might be holding on to:



**Talk to Kids About Coronavirus**

# **Prevention Strategies**

## **1. Be Available to Talk**

Kids have big questions, and it's okay to answer them. Take cues from your kids and offer clear but concise answers in developmentally appropriate language. Keep the focus on what you are doing to prepare and prevention strategies that are within your control like proper handwashing and avoiding large crowds.

## **2. Limit News Exposure**

Even when it seems like they're not listening, kids pick up on what they hear on TV and radio. Newscasters' tone of voice can be enough to set off alarm bells for kids, and unfamiliar words like pandemic and outbreak can be fear-inducing. Opt for watching or listening to news reports when kids are in bed or choose to read news articles if possible.

## **3. Stick to Routines and Boundaries**

Kids thrive with routines and boundaries, and predictability can be very comforting in anxious times. When some things feel out of control, routines can give kids a sense of security. School-aged kids might be used to seeing a visual schedule in their classrooms, so try using one at all. Write your daily routine on a whiteboard or make a paper schedule together. And make sure you include fun activities in your daily routine! Play board games, play outside, or have silly dance parties.

## **4. Set & Track Daily Goals**

Set small daily goals and track progress so kids can work toward something important to them! Make sure the goals are within their control. Set goals around how much they'll read each day, how many free throws they'll practice each day, or how many kind gestures they'll show toward family members. Track progress on a goal chart so they can have a visual reminder of the progress they're making!

## **5. Start or Continue Mindful Practices**

Mindfulness is an amazing practice for people of all ages. If you don't have a regular mindful practice already built in to your family time, try adding it to your routine. This can

look like 5 minute morning or bedtime guided meditation (look for apps like Calm or Headspace) or simple mindful mandala coloring. Find a mindful practice that you all enjoy doing together!

## **Responsive Strategies**

### **6. Practice Controlled Breathing**

If your child is showing signs of worry, take a moment to practice controlled breathing. You can simply count breaths for them (inhale 1 2 3 4 5 hold 1 2 3 4 exhale 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) or use tools like a pinwheel or bubbles. Help them slow their breathing and really exhale all of the air to calm their bodies and minds.

### **7. Try Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Help your child release tension from their body with a progressive muscle relaxation. In this exercise, children gradually tense up their muscles and then release them. Find scripts for this on your favorite mindfulness app or on Youtube:

### **8. Use Grounding Strategies**

Grounding strategies or techniques help kids reorient to the present moment when the worries are too big. These techniques help kids connect with their current environment in the here and now when their minds are imagining potential future scenarios. Try all of these grounding strategies to see which one your kids like best!

## **GROUNDING TECHNIQUES FOR KIDS**

### **9. Set a Timer**

When it's hard to let go of worries, set a 3- or 5-minute timer. During those 3 or 5 minutes, tell kids they're allowed to think about the worry all they want! But when the timer goes off, it's time to get up, change positions, move to a different room or environment, and think of something else.

### **10. Exercise Creativity**

If you have a child who likes to draw or write, try a creative exercise. Have your child personify their worry by imagining what the worry might look like if it were a real person, creature or thing. Maybe it looks like a big dragon. Maybe it looks like a monster. Or maybe it looks like an annoying mosquito. Then, they can draw a picture or comic or write a story about themselves as a superhero who defeats the worry!

### **11. Use a Journal or Feelings Tracker**

Give your kids a journal to write about feelings or use a feelings tracker daily. Sometimes worries are so big it feels like they define our whole day, but when we keep track of our feelings throughout the day with a visual tool, it's easier to see that worries are a smaller part of a healthy balance of emotions.

### **Other Strategies**

### **12. Acknowledge the Worries**

It's completely okay to acknowledge our kids' worries rather than ignoring them. Acknowledging worries won't solidify them but it will help your child understand that worry is a protective feeling that alerts us to potential danger. We can help ourselves remember it's just potential danger though, and use strategies to keep our worries in check. If you're looking for ways to explain worry to your child, [try these methods](#).

## **HELP KIDS UNDERSTAND WORRY**

### **13. Avoid Participating in Worry Rituals**

If your child is demonstrating any type of worry or checking ritual (i.e. washing hands excessively), avoid participating or encouraging these rituals. This sends the message to kids that the rituals are necessary when they see the adult they're looking to for support doing it too. Remind kids of the everyday strategies and routines you already have in place to prevent or protect against illness, like washing before eating or wiping down shopping carts with disinfectant wipes.

### **14. Avoid Excessive Reassurance**

It's natural to want to reassure our kids! We want them to feel safe and calm. Reassure when needed but avoid offering it too frequently as this can prevent kids from developing their own positive self talk. Practice things they can say to themselves when they're feeling worried like, "I can control my breathing," or "My family is taking care of me."

### **15. Be Mindful of Your Own Worries**

Again, it's completely reasonable for everyone to have some level of worry. But kids do pick up on our feelings and notice our anxieties, and they will take cues from us. If you're feeling anxious, practice your own mindful or calming activities, call a friend or loved one, practice self care, or reach out for help. Even if you're stuck at home, your therapist may offer phone services or you can try an app like Better Help or Talkspace.