

How to explain to young children about the coronavirus from a Christian perspective

By Tamsin Grimmer, Early Years Consultant.

It is difficult to know if and how we should respond to young children at this time. Should we try to shelter them from the situation by avoiding talking about it or should we talk about it in a manner in which our young children will understand? What about God? How can we pray about a pandemic with young children?

Children will have noticed that something is different, regardless of whether we have discussed the pandemic with them! They're not going to school, nursery, church or any of their usual groups, they haven't seen Nanna for several weeks, Mummy and Daddy are always at home and don't even take them to the shops anymore.

We cannot avoid talking with young children about how our lives have changed because of the coronavirus and we shouldn't feel we need to. Children are more resilient and have a greater depth of understanding than we often give them credit for. Sadly children also worry more than we might think, so I want to encourage parents and carers to not be afraid to talk and pray with their children about this situation.

We can be supportive and honest, and explain things to our children using language that they will understand. For example saying, "The coronavirus is a bug that people can get which makes them feel very poorly. They might feel very hot or have a nasty cough. Some people's bodies will find it difficult to recover from the illness. Other people will get totally better. We need to stay at home to help stop the virus from spreading and to help the doctors and nurses to care for the people who are poorly, and we can pray for them as they do their jobs."

We might need to be prepared to talk with our children about death and what this means. Death is a very abstract concept for young children and talking in terms of concrete things that children might understand can help. For example, "When we are dead we do not breathe, our heart stops beating and we cannot play anymore." Try to avoid using analogies like 'falling asleep' or 'at rest'. These are confusing for young children and can lead to them becoming frightened of resting or sleeping themselves. Instead, we should factually explain about life cycles and that every living thing will die one day. We can reassure them that we might feel sad and miss the person who died, but we believe that when you die you go to be with Jesus in Heaven, which is a very special place where there will be no more sadness or suffering. We also have lots of lovely, happy memories that we can share, and possibly photographs to look at to help us to remember their life.

Children might start to question where God is if they hear about people suffering and dying. We can reassure them that God is still in control and that we can spread his love, hope and peace to other people.



Playing at doctors and nurses!



Wearing gloves to tend to teddy is the new norm!

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Top Tips

- ✓ Answer any questions about the coronavirus as honestly as possible, remembering that it's OK to say, "I don't know!"
- ✓ Use correct language with the children, e.g. virus, and encourage them to have their own narrative about it.
- ✓ Use this virus as an opportunity to reinforce the importance of hygiene, e.g. hand washing, and make this into a fun game – there are now some online videos to help with this, new songs to sing etc.
- ✓ Read stories and books which include illness and hygiene practices... (e.g. *I don't want to wash my hands* by Tony Ross, *Germs are Not for Sharing* (board book) by Elizabeth Verdick and *Why Must I Wash My Hands?* by Jackie Gaff).
- ✓ Pray about the coronavirus with your children and engage with other Christians online.
- ✓ Don't talk about the coronavirus to other adults over the children's heads - they will pick up on anxiety or worries.
- ✓ Explain that some people who have other illnesses or people who are very old might get very poorly, but most people who get the virus get totally better.
- ✓ Use playful interactions as a means of sharing about the virus— play at doctors and nurses, make up stories and rhymes, create sock puppets together.
- ✓ Celebrate and share stories about acts of kindness, or of everyday people being superheroes like Captain Tom Moore.
- ✓ Encourage your children to take part in initiatives like #chasetherainbow by drawing a rainbow together and putting it in your window. This is not only fun but helps us all to still feel part of a community.
- ✓ Use technology to support their social lives as well as your own. If possible, video call friends or ask family members to read them a bedtime story over the phone.
- ✓ Lastly, **have fun together**. This is an amazing opportunity for you to spend more time with your child and to enjoy their company.