

## Talking To Children About COVID-19

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*Keeping kids busy isn't the only challenge at this time in history (photo courtesy of Valerie Finney).*

With the COVID-19 pandemic dominating headlines and becoming a topic of conversation almost everywhere, many children have questions about the situation, especially given the amount of disruption they have seen in their lives as a result. This includes the suspension of school, physical distancing, limitations on public gatherings and more.

When it comes to answering the questions, Lynda Rideout, who is part of the Family Support Team at Envision Counselling and Support Services, recommends keeping the tone of the conversation with children developmentally-appropriate.

"For example, if a child tells you that they are scared, you can agree with them, and be empathetic," Rideout noted. "Reassurance is also good. Share ideas and things to do to help ensure everyone in the house stays healthy."

"For many children, the lack of in-person social interaction has been particularly hard. Add in the closure of public parks and facilities, and many kids are left wondering what they can do."

One way to help broach the subject, and explain to children, particularly younger ones, why those places aren't available is to have a conversation about germs.

From there, you can begin to explain more about why things are closed.

"Just being honest in that conversation, that in order to be healthy we need to stay away from areas that there are germs that we are able to pick up," Rideout said.

Children don't have to forego social interactions, however. Thanks to technology, there are a number of ways to stay in touch with friends and family, aside from just picking up a phone and calling them.

"There are lots of alternatives, like going on FaceTime, or Skyping or having a WhatsApp kind of virtual playdate with our friends."

One age group which can, at times, struggle with the restrictions in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 is teenagers. For many, they have seen a number of activities and events which they have looked forward to for years, such as graduation, put on hold. Dealing with situations like this is something most teenagers have never encountered, and there is a bit of a learning curve for them when it comes to managing those emotions.

Once again, communication is a key component.

"It's having that open, honest conversation about COVID-19 and how it's affecting all of us, and even though your teen may be at low risk for contracting the virus, that they can carry it and pass it along to their loved ones," explains Rideout.

She adds it's also important to stress how COVID-19 is affecting the world and how important it is for everyone to do their part to help prevent the spread.

Rideout recommends encouraging children to ask questions, be appreciative of the help they provide around the house, and take the time to connect with them since it gives them the opportunity to have time with their parents. The time can also help the parents adjust to the new normal which we are all trying to get used to.