

# News Release

NEBRASKA  
Good Life. Great Mission.  
Department of Health and Human Services

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## How to Talk To Your Kids About The Coronavirus Outbreak

**Lincoln** – Parents normally at work are quarantined, kids are out of school indefinitely. Your children know something is wrong and they come to you with questions.

“Children look to adults for guidance on how to handle stressful events,” said Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). “Acknowledging their concern will help your kids speak about their fears. When parents and caregivers deal with the evolving COVID-19 situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children.”

“As the uncertainty over how long this pandemic will continue grows, it’s not only stressful for you, but for your kids,” said Mikayla Johnson, disaster behavioral health coordinator and administrator for the Division of Behavioral Health. “Remind kids that doctors and healthcare workers are learning as much as they can about the virus and are doing what they can to keep everyone safe.”

### What else can parents do?

- Reassure children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them healthy ways to cope with stress. Encourage them to talk about and label their feelings. Reassure them those feelings are normal.
- Children may be acting out their fear and anxiety, so note any change in behaviors.
- Reinforce with kids the importance of washing their hands often, coughing into a tissue, and getting enough sleep.
- As much as is possible, create a set routine for the day to provide a sense of normalcy. Wherever you can provide the familiar in this time of uncertainty, you are working in the

best interest of their mental health. While kids will likely be excited that school isn't in session for the first few days, boredom and a desire to see friends will rapidly change that.

- Explain social distancing rules and the need for them. Help them identify new ways to stay in touch with friends and family.
- Inform kids of COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and let them know to tell you if they are feeling any of these things.
- Limit your child's exposure to media coverage of the event. Keep young children away from frightening images they may see on TV, social media, computers, etc. For older kids, talk together about what they are hearing on the news and correct any misinformation or rumors you may hear.
- Set a good example by showing empathy and support to those who are ill.
- Connect with friends and family members over electronic communications.

As a parent, if you are struggling with your own fear or anxiety and need tips on how to talk with your child, help is available 24/7. Please call the Nebraska Family Helpline, 800-866-8660. It's okay to not have all the answers. Reaching out to keep you and your family healthy and safe should be a priority. More suggestions and tips can be found

here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or someone else, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or the in the event of a true emergency, you can call 911 or Nebraska Family Helpline, 800-866-8660 who can access local crisis response teams. As well, SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call the Disaster Distress Helpline at (800) 985-5990, or text **TalkWithUs to 66746** to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

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