



Giving children guidance



The following recommendations are intended to serve as support and suggestions, which can always be individually adjusted and modified.

What to say about Corona and how to talk about it?

1. Figuratively speaking: Become a “beacon”. **Guidance and connection** are deeply stabilising factors in times of “rough seas”. Successful guidance should include two messages for you to convey: “What is happening at the moment is strange and sometimes also disconcerting” and “I am there for you, know what to do and what is happening at the moment will not upset us.” Find suitable words for your own emotions and indicate that these are totally normal, appropriate and not threatening.



2. Indicate that you are **open to talk to** and ask your child what it has heard, what it already knows and about its perception, thoughts and questions. Also discuss that worries and insecurities in situations which are still very new and unfamiliar, to a certain extent, are always part of it but at the moment everyone can do something to quickly improve the situation. **Take your child’s concerns seriously** and discuss or do things to reduce them or make them more bearable.

3. Give your child **information** about the current situation which is **appropriate** to its age but also temperament, maturity and level of concern. Take the care needed for this topic but don’t make it bigger than it really needs to be at the moment.

Conveying and correcting information

Tell your child **what we really know** and above all that not all that is written or reported is true. Convey that it is “normal” for false information to crop up and be passed on when a lot of people talk about an issue. Children know this from the game “**Chinese Whisper**”. Why not guide yourself by using phrases from our info sheet called “Corona explained to children.”



You can find reliable and well-founded information for adults at the Robert Koch institute (* www.rki.de), the WHO (* www.who.int) or UNICEF (* www.unicef.de). Use the information available there to get yourself correct, up-to-date information **but make sure to limit** the content and quantity of information you give to younger children in particular. Use the questions actually asked as a guide as well as that which children currently know and need to know. A helpful guiding principle in this context is: As much information as necessary, as agitated as possible.

By all means be honest if you don’t have an answer for some questions. You can think about where to find suitable information together just as much as suggesting that “currently more and more is being discovered about Corona and new answers arrive daily”. For younger children you can find

information on the internet pages of “Sendung mit der Maus” (German children’s programme) (* www.wdrmaus.de) . For older children the “Logo” format on ZDF is a useful source of information (* www.zdf.de/kinder/logo). If possible, however, watch these formats together with your children in order to be able to have an answer ready for reactions or queries.

The aim of your discussions should be that children’s minds are calmed and hearts feels secure - if you notice that your child is more likely getting uneasy or insecure then get support and take advice.

Emphasise security

Our **perspective and attitude** are decisive for how we perceive the world: This applies to children and adults equally. In this situation too, you are the role model for your children. If you let the general fuss affect you and let yourself get carried away by each new piece of information your children will also become very alarmed.



If you realise you are overwhelmed by your own emotions and need a sympathetic ear or a **shoulder to lean on** it is imperative that you take this need seriously but make sure to use other adults. Children can become so insecure from the intensity of unfiltered grown-up fear, frustration or mental overload that they either retreat because they don’t want to take on any more or because they lose confidence that things can get better again. In both cases they lose the contact and, with it, precisely the connection they need more than ever at the moment.

The Corona virus and its effects are currently a big part of life but only ONE part of a much greater puzzle. At this stage, check your own **media usage** and attitude on the issue. Carefully check which information is truly well-founded and ensure that you set up media-free time. Not everything that is currently happening world-wide with regard to the Corona virus is directly relevant to your own life or that of your children.

Filter, control and interrupt situations in which discussions tend to cause people’s heads to spin, i.e. lead to worry and not to better guidance. In this way you can support children, in particular the younger ones, when they find it difficult to differentiate between their own situation and that shown by the media. Keep in mind that children find it much harder to control anxiety fantasies than adults.

Create a **strong counterbalance** in what they experience, by talking to your children about the safety measures being taken all over the world at the moment. Emphasise that many clever people all over the world, also in Germany and their own city, are continuously working to better understand the Corona virus, develop medication, treat already infected people and protect healthy ones. Make it clear that also the closure of establishments, “staying at home” and restricted visits to grandparents are precisely part of what everyone is currently doing to contribute. During daily developments, don’t forget to also discuss in which parts of the world things are slowly improving and for once, very deliberately, don’t count the infected people world-wide but rather those who have already recovered.

In order for your children to experience feeling secure it is important - as far as is possible - to maintain familiar **routines and structures** or, where necessary, develop new, reliable procedures. Continue to be that “beacon” throughout daily life, set up new routines together with the children and keep in mind that emotions are difficult to control in stressful times. Hence react to “slip-ups” and “losing their rag” with clarity but without severity or punishment.

Moreover, you can convey a strong **sense of community** by developing a joint basic concept. Emphasise that the issue “has nothing to do with where someone comes from or what they look like” but rather that currently “everyone, in other words the whole world together, is fighting the Corona virus”. It is not helpful to look for culprits or to spread prejudice.

You can contribute to your own sense of security in the current situation by becoming active and contributing something yourself. Discuss with your children who, from the head of state to the child at nursery, is currently bearing which responsibility and who has what job to do to help.

Spring into action

One of the best ways of reducing your own insecurity and concern is to do something yourself. This reduces the feeling of being at the mercy of a situation and conveys a **stronger, more active self-assurance**.



You set the scene in these challenging times. Within this framework you can and should regularly involve your children, in an **age appropriate** manner, where information is concerned and for procedures and setting up a daily structure.

Sometimes it’s not so easy and at the same time fundamentally important for children to express their concerns in order not to remain alone with them. Agree with them that it is your job to get proper information and find answers. The child’s job is to recognise **distress and questions** which still need answers and to speak up about them.

Furthermore, children can, for example, be involved and mobilised in the following:

- Illustrate your new daily structure by means of a written or drawn schedule, and let your child tick off the completed tasks.
- Define what your child can contribute to the new daily structure. For example, this could include helping to prepare meals.
- Convey the measures for keeping a distance and paying attention to hygiene to your children and practice with them. Praise them when it works!
- Convey to your child that, in stressful times, it is especially important to pay attention to the head, heart and body. Get suggestions on which methods you can practice and implement with your child.
- Suggest ways in which your child can stay in contact with relatives and acquaintances and cultivate friendships.
- Together, have a thought for all those who are currently helping or are themselves ill, by, for example, lighting a little candle at a certain time or putting up a sign in the window that says: “You are in our thoughts!”.

It’s not so much about the size of the action or profundity of the gesture but rather the **core principle** of these measures and feeling active yourself. So ask yourself: “How can my child sense that it is playing a role at the moment, that it can do something or contribute?”

If your child is unable to get enthusiastic about something (outside of the absolute necessities) or states clearly that it doesn’t want to do something, make sure to consider whether your child might be feeling overwhelmed at the moment and is retreating for this reason.

Get yourself some suggestions for age-appropriate involvement of children and read the AETAS Kinderstiftung **pamphlets**. You can find further concrete ideas on how to implement things here. Go to **www.aetas-kinderstiftung.de**.

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