

# ACTIVITIES THAT SUPPORT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COVID-19

This tip sheet suggests activities that contribute to peace of mind and positive action at different developmental stages.

## 1. EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Direct teaching about COVID-19 is not appropriate for children in kindergarten who have not been exposed to media or community conversations about COVID-19. For children at this level, the focus is role modelling and learning about important practical actions such as hand hygiene. (See Module 3 for more information on this). For early primary children and those who already have some awareness of COVID-19, some of the information and activities below may be relevant.

## 2. MIDDLE PRIMARY SCHOOL

For children with an existing knowledge and understanding of COVID-19, a useful approach is using a range of resources to support and extend their knowledge and develop their **critical literacy skills**. To do this in a way that is not overwhelming and continues to allow children to focus on things they enjoy and want to learn about, embed learning within everyday learning and activities. It is important that COVID-19 learning does not displace usual activities and learning.

### Discussion

Ask *'What do you think a 'virus' is? Can you share an example of a virus?'*

- Write children's answers on a piece of paper where they can see them.
- Share your understanding of what a virus is using the **'Did you know: Bacteria and viruses'** textbox as a guide.
- If they shared 'Coronavirus' or 'COVID-19' as one of their examples, circle it.
- If not, write it on the piece of paper and ask: *What have you heard about Coronavirus/COVID-19?*
- Write all their thoughts and ideas on the piece of paper, inwardly noting those that are accurate and those that are incorrect.

Use the following critical thinking skills – *'examine, question, evaluate, and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about issues and practices'*. Discussion prompts include:

- Share there is a lot of misinformation and rumour about COVID-19.
- Ask *'From the thoughts and ideas we have shared, can you identify any information that might not be true?'* (Circle) Note: if students are unsure, identify one for them, reassuring those who shared it that they are not wrong but it is important that we know what is true and what isn't so together we can slow the spread.
- Taking one of the 'untrue' ideas identified, ask some or all the following questions: *Why might that be the case? What are the 'hidden' messages? What's missing from this information? What are my beliefs about this? Why do I believe this? Whose interests are being served /who is advantaged? Whose interests are not served/who is disadvantaged? What needs to change and how can I contribute to this change?*

Emphasise that COVID-19 is about everyone and everyone needs to work together to support each other.

- Emphasise the actions we can all take to be safe and help. Discuss that together we can slow the spread.
- Reinforce that although this virus can make some people very sick, the vast majority of people recover well.

### BEING DIVERSE

*Some children may respond better to visual demonstration or prompts over words for handwashing. Material targeted at a younger audience may also be suitable. Some children may respond to teaching via social stories.*

**Search: Supporting Neuro Diverse Children**

## BACTERIA AND VIRUSES

BY SIOUXSIE WILES

*Bacteria and viruses are teeny tiny life forms – also called microbes and you usually need a microscope to see them properly. Just like we can't live without bees, we can't live without bacteria and viruses – they do lots of really important stuff for the planet.*

*Some microbes can make us sick – like the viruses that give us colds and upset tummies.*

*Bacteria and viruses are very different and a good way to think about them is to think about phones and apps.*

- *Bacteria are like phones – you turn them on, and they work. They do stuff.*
- *Apps don't work unless they are loaded on to your phone. They need the phone to work. In the same way, viruses need our cells to be able to grow and make more copies of themselves. They can turn our cells into virus-producing factories.*

SOURCE: SIOUXSIE WILES (*Contributing Writer, The Spinoff*)

- Reassure them that children seldom get sick from the COVID-19 virus or, if they do, they usually only experience mild symptoms.
- Explain that scientists and doctors are still trying to understand COVID-19, but they already know that it spreads like a cold.
- Share one or more of these resources with the class:
  - **Nanogirl coronavirus resources for children and parents**
  - **Mindheart: Coronavirus picture book**
  - **NPR: Coronavirus comic for kids**
- Ask students what they learned from the resource(s) and, again, listen out for the feelings being expressed and provide validation and reassurance.

### 3. INTERMEDIATE AND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Most intermediate and secondary school students will have had considerable exposure to conversations and media about COVID-19. Their knowledge can be extended using a range of resources. Open communication and direction towards reliable sources are important, rather than shielding them from information.

Complete the activities for primary school students above and then follow up with the activities below.

#### Activity: Finding Out What I Need to Know

##### What you need

- Paper and pens
- Access to a Smart TV/laptop and Wi-Fi

##### Discussion

Ask *‘What questions do you have about Coronavirus?’*

- Write their answers on the board/piece of paper where they can see them.

Provide them with the following links or offline print resources from the following sites for groups.

- [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Information](#)
- [World Health Organization Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information.](#)

Have students work in groups to find out the answers to the questions using these reliable sources.

**EXTRA:** Search *You Tube: Q & A with Dr Michelle Dickinson and Dr Juliet Gerrard*

(SOURCE: PM JACINDA ARDERN, FACEBOOK WATCH).

#### What’s real?

Credible sources of information provided by medical and science professionals include:

- [Unite against COVID-19 – New Zealand government information on COVID-19](#)
- [Ministry of Health COVID-19 updates and latest information](#)
- [World Health Organization Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)
- [World Health Organization Health Alert, available on WhatsApp](#)

There are ways to explore whether online information is legitimate including looking the url and the source, looking at the quality of information, and checking facts. Be wary of spreading false information and causing distress to others.

**EXTRA:** Review and discuss *WHO Myth Busters* (SOURCE: WHO)

#### Activity: Fear, fake news and facts

##### What you need

- Paper and pens
- Access to a Smart TV/laptop and Wi-Fi

##### Discussion

**Refer** to the Newsroom article: *Critical thinking in an age of fake news*. In a post-truth era of alternative facts, the ability to discern what is true is an increasingly important skill.

Read the article to/with them. Ask them how the article links to what is unfolding around COVID-19, how information is being shared and what information is being shared.

Ask: *Where have you been getting your information about Coronavirus? What have you noticed about the different styles of information?*

- Write their answers on the board/piece of paper where they can see them.

Using the critical literacy skills (*examine, question, evaluate, and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about issues and practices*), ask students to source two articles or other media sources, one to illustrate facts and science and one to illustrate fear mongering read the articles.

- Have students compare and contrast their responses.
- After reviewing the resources, ask: *What stood out from each article? How would you determine reliable sources of information about Coronavirus? What have you noticed about the different styles of information? How did you feel in response to each type of information?*
- Write their answers on the board/piece of paper where they can see them.

Explain that:

- fake news relies on strong emotional reactions such as fear and anger for people to share it
- it is important to make health and wellbeing decisions based on reliable and scientifically accurate information. This will help us, as a country and as communities, slow the spread.

#### Wellbeing Check Up for everyone: How do we feel?

The provision of COVID-19 information is ideally followed by acknowledgement and reflection of the students’ emotional states. Emotional distress is normal, and adults play an important role in supporting children and young people to recognise, understand, describe, express and cope with feelings.

##### Discussion:

- Explain that we all respond to information and situations differently.
- Create a poster with people’s faces expressing a variety of emotions (younger children) or words (as many as possible) with the names of emotions (older students).
- Ask them to spend a few minutes reflecting on their reactions to the learning material and then offer them the opportunity to share feelings.

*Key Messages:  
Everyone has feelings.  
Feelings are Important.  
All feelings are OK.*

Communicate acceptance of emotional experiences by showing interest in them and offer words to acknowledge student feelings, for example: “Everyone feels overwhelmed sometimes”.

**EXTRA:** For younger children try the *Sparklers Faces* game or the *Sparklers Frozen Emotions* game.

**EXTRA:** Create a classroom worry box where children can write out or draw a picture of their worries. Make time to acknowledge and problem solve these worries.

**EXTRA:** Create a feelings wall for using words or pictures to represent different feelings. Use a card to write down each feeling and use Velcro to attach them to the wall so that the card can be moved. Use the wall as a check-in for how they are feeling during COVID-19.

**EXTRA:** Introduce mindfulness and ask them how they would like to utilise it during the COVID-19 experience. See *Class Dojo Mindfulness* for more information.

*Note: Unless they have demonstrated prior COVID-19 knowledge, kindergarten and early-primary children can do these tasks without focusing on COVID-19. Use any daily classroom scenario to discuss feelings using expressions and words.*