

CORONAVIRUS: A nursery rhyme can turn children's anxiety into a healthy habit

Ten simple tips to help the children understand what they are experiencing

These days, when the theme of Coronavirus is at the centre of the news, taken up by the media and social media, children and adolescents risk being overexposed to information, not always correct, that can be a source of stress. Sometimes, the language used is not age-appropriate and this could induce fears and concerns for the safety of the children.

Similarly, the discomfort and generalized anxiety that the adults around them can experience can be an additional source of tensions.

To give children and adolescents the necessary support, Save the Children – thanks to the experience gained over the years in the protection of children in emergency settings – has developed these simple tips, through which parents and adults can address the concerns of the children.

- 1. LISTEN. Listening to children is the first step for understanding their emotional state.** Emotionally and psychologically supporting children and adolescents means, first of all, being close to them by welcoming their concerns and fears. It is essential to understand their needs in order to be able to respond adequately to their requests;
- 2. PROVIDE SIMPLE AND CLEAR INFORMATION.** Telling the truth in the simplest way is always the best thing to do. To do it, each adult can refer to official websites, such as the [Ministero della salute](#). Giving information using a simple language that is appropriate to their age is the best way to reassure them and facilitate the understanding of what is happening around them;
- 3. DO NOT OVEREXPOSE THE CHILDREN TO INFORMATION. Avoid making children spend too much time in front of the media and social media, so as not to amplify the confusion about what they see and listen to.** Excessive exposure is also likely to be counterproductive and trigger mechanisms of rejection or over-minimisation of the situation. Continuing to show images of hospitals, masks and the constant update of the number of infections and deaths, can only increase negative thoughts;
- 4. REASSURE THEM ABOUT THE PROTECTION MEASURES TAKEN. Explain to children that adults and especially institutions are doing everything they can to protect them and the people close to them.** It is essential to make children and adolescents understand that preventive behaviours, such as school closures in some Italian regions, the suspension of school trips and aggregate activities throughout the country, are necessary measures to have more control and ensure that the population is adequately protected;
- 5. DEEPEN KNOWLEDGE.** Proposing in-depth moments, also with games, to study the scientific themes related to the characteristics of the virus will help children and adolescents to feel more aware and understand more the indications of the behaviours to adopt that have been indicated by the health authorities;
- 6. BE AN EXAMPLE.** Adults must be the first to follow the correct behaviours: it is essential to be careful to avoid expressing negative feelings in front of children and adolescents, who

might be influenced by the adults around them. It is also essential that adults follow the rules and behaviours indicated by the relevant institutions involving children to do the same.

- 7. MAINTAIN YOUR DAILY LIFE. Do not change your behaviours and habits, unless required by the relevant authorities, it is important** in order not to create additional sources of anxiety and stress. For those who are unable to go to school or attend the normal recreational activities they were used to, it is important to maintain a sense of normality through games and study even at home;
- 8. DO NOT DISCRIMINATE. Avoid behaviours or statements that are discriminatory against the infected or people from a certain geographical area.** Again, adults must be an example and be able to explain to children who commit discriminatory acts that this is a wrong behaviour. In front of a child who is a victim of discrimination, it is important to try to involve other parents, teachers and those close to the child, so as not to make him feel excluded, by sharing the correct information.
- 9. EVALUATE THE OPPORTUNITIES COMING FROM THE NEW MEDIA. To reduce the sense of isolation, especially where children are forced to stay at home, digital technologies can be a useful tool for socialization and learning.** However, it is necessary for parents and adults to promote the conscious and correct use of these tools.
- 10. SMALL GESTURES THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Finding new and fun ways to entice children to have correct behaviours can help them these make small healthy habit.** Sometimes even a simple nursery rhyme can help teach children that their hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds, not putting their hands in your mouth or sneezing in the hollow of their arm. A little at a time these small attentions, also creating opportunities for fun, will turn into healthy habits.