

# What To Tell Children About Influenza Pandemics

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1. Share in a calm and reassuring manner in language a child can understand that there are times when people become very sick and some may even die. Let the child know that people are doing all they can to keep people well and safe. Tell them it may be necessary to do things a bit differently to try to stay well like not being around people who are sick.
2. Tell children that they are personally loved, and that they will be cared for to the best of everyone's ability.
3. Allow children to express their feelings including fear, uncertainty etc. in any and all ways that the child finds comfortable. This may include verbal, art expression such as drawings and paintings as well as by demonstrating their understanding of the situation and their feelings about the situation. Children often express their concerns and feelings in their play or story telling.
4. Validate their expressions of their feelings and concerns. Help them to know that it is OK to have a variety of feelings. Share with them generally and briefly that you also have feelings about influenza. Model for them without over burdening them with your feelings and concerns. You are there to support them not vice versa.
5. Support them in exploring ways for them to feel as safe as possible including preparing good safety activities like washing hands, not touching used facial tissues, coughing and sneezing in elbow. Practice these activities with them in a fun manner.
6. Reassure the child that that you will do all that you can to insure that their daily life activities continues to be as routine as possible. Also let them know that there may be differences at times. Communicate to the child in a comforting way that this situation will not last forever.
7. Don't let children watch or listen to detailed information regarding influenza emergency without your presence. Adults need to monitor the amount and type of media exposure that a child receives. Ask them to explain to you in their words what is being talked about on the TV or radio. Gently correct any misconceptions that they may have in age appropriate ways.
8. Limit exposure to media coverage close to bed or nap time. Provide a peaceful and calm environment prior to sleep.
9. Provide alternative activities for the child which is age appropriate instead of watching extensive media coverage.
10. Offer age appropriate empowering and productive activities such as making get well cards for influenza victims who are sick or thank you cards for emergency response personnel like the police and medical teams.

11. Encourage children to pray or think positive thoughts for all those concerned including the person or persons that are sick, their families, and friends. Additionally encourage them to pray or offer positive thoughts for those who are helping to correct this situation.

12. Remind children to be thankful for all the good things in their lives. Have the child list the good things in their life. This activity will help a child to recall that there are good and joyful things in their lives and world even in a medical emergency.

Dr. Terrie Modesto is an expert in critical incident thanatology (disaster grief and preparedness). She specializes in assisting individuals and communities regarding death, dying and bereavement issues during crisis events. Dr. Modesto is also an ordained United Methodist pastor and currently serves as the Chief Thanatologist for the TEAR Center. Her two most recent continuing education courses are: *When So Many Die: The Church's Response in Pandemic / Epidemic.*; as well as *When So Many Die: How Family and Communities Can Respond To A Pandemic.*

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