

Talking to Children about Coronavirus | Some Resources

Shefali Tripathi Mehta

A 3-year-old was heard telling another about 'corona'. Her eyes were wide with caution as she warned her friend to not go anywhere near the play area because 'corona is there'. Another day, she started to wail when a person without a mask approached her. The parents had managed to instil the fear of the virus in her so she would not let her guard down when outdoors or on her own. Their caution is understandable but when we unscramble the reality of a critical situation into a bogeyman for children, we make them vulnerable to psychological and emotional harm arising from the absence of drawing logical solutions and expressing their fears and anxieties. Age-appropriate information about the pandemic and how it spreads, along with opportunities for children to ask questions and share feelings is how adults, whether teachers, parents, or older siblings, must approach this topic. Here is a review of the literature created by storytellers, teachers and parents to talk to children about the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers may take a leaf from this and create stories that are set in the children's own contexts. They can transact these in class through storytelling or other exciting ways, such as the use of puppets and role-plays.

Pratham Books' StoryWeaver Community

On this platform, which was conceived to extend the reach of books in the mother tongues of children in disadvantaged settings, stories are available free in most Indian (26) and foreign languages.

The Novel Coronavirus: We Can Stay Safe

Written and illustrated by Deepa Balsavar, et al.

Link: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/128586-the-novel-coronavirus-we-can-stay-safe>

To tell a child to rub soap on their hands for 20 seconds for effective prevention from COVID-19 is great but how would a child keep the 20-second time? This book offers a fun solution that all children will love. Various characters, from grandmothers to children, talk about complying with COVID-19-preventive behaviours, such as washing hands, sneezing into the elbow, maintaining a safe distance from each other etc. It also talks of schools being closed and people having to stay indoors and their

loneliness. A very good resource for children in classes I and II.

Lights in the Heart too!

Written by Neha Kumar

Illustrated by Alina Aphayvanh, et al.

Link: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/127894-lights-in-the-heart-too>

This simple story touches the point of being kind to animals, of feeding and caring for them and of not abandoning them for the fear of the unknown virus. Children will also get some assurance from the fact that other children are also in the same situation; that they too cannot step out to play or go to school or market.

Corona story: I am Rahino's brother

Written by Omprakash Kshatriya 'Prakash'

Illustrated by Floriana Giotta, et al.

Online: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/123427-corona-story-i-am-rahino-s-brother>

A dialogue between a child and the coronavirus is used to explain how a virus can cause the common cold and also the COVID-19. It is on target in explaining how handwashing can protect, a logical explanation of which is important for children to comply with it. But if the target of this story is children with some knowledge of science because there is mention of molecules and the structure of a hydrogen bomb, it may fail to engage very small children and the older ones may find it too simplistic in terms of its tone and explanation.

It is important to use correct vocabulary and phonetic sounds in local languages when translated from English. So, 'Rhinovirus' in English should not have been transcribed as 'rahino' virus in Hindi.

You can make the change: Break the chain of corona

Written by Riddhi Nath

Illustrated by Khushbu Vala and Louwrisa Blaauw

Online: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/124803-you-can-make-the-change-break-the-chain-of-corona>

A realistic retelling of how the virus spreads. This is

sure to peg the protocols clearly and succinctly into the minds of children.

A Letter for Amma

Written and illustrated by Ramya Iyer

Online: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/132886-a-letter-for-amma>

A 9-year-old's letter to his mother who is a nurse and away from home, this story can help children whose family members are engaged in COVID-relief efforts to open up and express the anxiety they may feel for them. Teachers can help these children understand the value of the work their dear ones are engaged in.

A group of villagers sitting under a banyan tree

Written by Estella Rodrigues, et al.

Illustrated by Prashant Kumar Singh, et al.

Online: <https://storyweaver.org.in/stories/257966-a-group-of-villagers-sitting-under-a-banyan-tree>

How a village comes together to find a way in which to accommodate workers returning to villages from cities. While there is a real reason to be afraid of the returning members to villages because they may carry the infection, this story will help children view the situation in the light of reason and understand the need for quarantine and isolation. It may also make children question their elders if they indulge in baseless stigmatization of COVID-positive people.

Mayo Clinic: How to talk to your kids about COVID-19

Parents and teachers can use this resource to talk to children about the disease and its impact. The strategies it provides will help children cope with stress and anxiety. There is also a video, in the end, explaining the nasal-swab testing so children will not panic in a situation where this becomes imperative.

Link: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases/conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/kids-covid-19/art-20482508>

UNICEF: How teachers can talk to children about coronavirus disease

Detailed discussions for every age/level of children are available here. The teacher must tailor the information provided in this to the needs of their students and their contexts.

Link: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teachers-can-talk-children-about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Coronavirus: A Book for Children

Published by Nosy Crow

Written by Elizabeth Jenner, Kate Wilson and Nia Roberts

Illustrated by Axel Scheffler

Read Aloud by Hugh Bonneville

Nosy Crow, an independent British children's publishing company, has a free audiobook on *YouTube* that provides comprehensive corona-virus information for children. It ends on a positive note that if we all follow COVID-protocols, one day soon we will win over the virus and say goodbye to these trying times.

Link: <https://youtu.be/fCjDo9SskQU>

Kids, Vaayu & Corona: Who wins the fight?

Published by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

Written by Ravindra Khaiwal and Suman Mor

A comic book for Indian children with a superhero called Vaayu, this was commissioned to educate children about the coronavirus. Apart from disease awareness, it tells children how to stay safe. Well-intentioned and well-conceived, it is hastily executed and full of typos. One wonders where the superhero's cape vanishes in the last but one page and why he sometimes speaks in speech bubbles and sometimes in thought bubbles! But with all these failings, it can be a good conversation starter for small children who may find the idea of a superhero exciting.

PDF: <https://online.ndmc.gov.in/covid19/images/corona-comic.pdf.pdf>



Shefali Tripathi Mehta is the Associate Editor of the Learning Curve. She works at the Azim Premji University and can be contacted at shefali.mehta@apu.edu.in