

PARENTS' GUIDE TO COPING WITH THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) CRISIS

Information compiled by Dr. Kata Rosenblum and Dr. Prachi Shah | Document last updated 03/24/2020

These are hard times. During this coronavirus outbreak many parents are feeling stressed or worried about lots of things, from staying healthy, keeping the family well, paying bills, caring for children who are homebound, keeping kids on task with school assignments, and the list goes on. These kinds of worries can feel overwhelming and cause strong emotions, so if you are feeling that way know that you are not alone. We will get through all of this and can make it a little easier by taking good care of ourselves.



Feeling strong during times of crisis

During this stressful, rapidly changing time, it may feel like many things are out of our control. In moments like this, it is helpful to take a step back, and consider the parts of our lives where we can make choices, and can take positive action. We can feel more peaceful (and less worried!) when we recognize how we play an active role in helping ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Focus on the little things. Inch by inch things are a cinch, yard by yard, things are hard. What are the “inch by inch” (little) things you can focus on, so you don’t get lost in the big things that might feel too overwhelming? Some ideas for “small actions” are listed below that might help you feel more calm inside.

Nurturing and “Refueling” ourselves

Caring for ourselves helps us to be ready and able to care for and nurture our children and those we love. Here are some suggestions that might help during this difficult time:



Take time to relax : Find things that help you feel calm. These might include prayer, mindfulness, a warm shower, looking out the window, reading, listening to music.



Practice the 3 R's : The same advice we offer children is also good for ourselves!

- > **Reassure :** Remind yourself that your feelings are ok and understandable, and of the positive things you can do for yourself to get through this hard time.
- > **Routines :** Keep a regular daily schedule with time for your daily “must dos,” and exercise and rest.
- > **Regulate :** To manage stress, actively engage in strategies that will help you calm. For example, practice deep breathing; take a walk; draw your feelings; listen to a favorite song; reach out to a friend; close your eyes and imagine sunshine filling you with warmth.

In moments of stress, remember to breathe, reach out to a friend, take a walk, or draw your feelings.
We are all in a difficult situation and we will get through this time together.

PARENTS' GUIDE TO COPING WITH THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

Information compiled by Dr. Kate Rosenblum and Dr. Prachi Shah | Document last updated 03/24/2020

Find your center in the midst of the storm. Find a way to connect with the center of your deepest self to re-awaken your sense of **J.O.Y.**



J: Just taking a moment

When things feel overwhelming, take a moment to be still. Take the time to notice your feelings, pause and reflect. Even just three slow deep breaths can bring a moment of calm into your day.



O: Observe the lights

Find the "light" in the midst of the "shadows." What are the small things for which you are grateful? The taste of your morning coffee, the warm shower you had, the phone call you received from a friend... Remember how you felt when you experienced someone's care and kindness.



Y: You make a difference

Remind yourself that you can be a source of light and kindness for others in the world. At a time when so much is out of our control, you can focus on the moments when you have made a difference—for your child, family or community. Reminding yourself of the ways you have helped others and spread kindness can help you feel more connected, and more peaceful.



Stay emotionally connected!

Experts are recommending that we keep space between people – at least 6 feet. This is called social distancing and is an important way to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. However, keeping physical space between people does not mean emotional distancing! In fact, staying connected to friends and family will reduce your stress. Call a loved one or check in with your neighbor while maintaining at least 6-feet of space between you and them. It can be calming to simply think about the people you care about and draw on the strength of those connections. So stay back, but keep your heart close.

Understanding the facts about COVID-19 and being prepared can make an outbreak less stressful.



Seek out news and information from public health sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Be sure to follow prevention guidelines, including **washing your hands often, trying not to touch your face, sneezing or coughing into a tissue or your elbow, and maintaining 6-feet of space** between those you don't live with.



Call your health care provider if you experience symptoms, including **fever, coughing, and/or shortness of breath.**

Need help getting food, applying for unemployment, or paying your utilities? Call 2-1-1, or contact your local health department or church.

Find assistance online by visiting mi211.org, findhelp.org, or covid313.org (Detroit).

The Importance of Routines for Kids

Information developed by Dr. Erika Bocknek, Educational Psychology,
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It's commonly understood that routines are good for children and support their development. However, in uncertain times like these, families are working hard to figure out...what's essential about routines for their young children? Why do they matter and what kind of characteristics matter most? Unlocking these secrets will help families adapt to changing and uncertain times.



Why routines matter

Research shows that routines support healthy social emotional development in early childhood. In particular, children with regular routines at home have self-regulation skills, the building blocks of good mental health. When children learn to regulate feelings and behaviors, it means they are able to identify their feelings and have skills to manage those feelings so that they don't feel overwhelmed. Young children who learn to do this well are better able to adapt to everyday challenges, stressors, and new expectations. Children do not learn to do this all at once. Just as when a child is learning other important skills, like reading and writing, self-regulation is a set of skills that build over time. Every stage includes age-appropriate milestones and important things parents can do to coach children from one stage into the next.

There are many parenting behaviors that are important. These include talking about feelings with your child and helping your child respond to his feelings in ways that feel right for your family—such as by taking deep breaths or getting hugs. Parents can also provide structure and support routines for children. When children live in organized and predictable environments, they learn to self-regulate in organized and predictable ways, leading to optimal mental health over time.

What about routines matter

Often parents hear the word routine and imagine it is a proxy for schedule or even more generally structure. Those constructs are similar, but routines require a particular set of characteristics for children to be most developmentally supportive: predictability and accessibility. Children benefit from relationships and environments that are predictable to them: this includes important caregivers who behave in predictable ways, and events that occur at predictable times. For example, many studies demonstrate the benefit of bedtime routines and dinnertime routines. Children can anchor their day according to these expected interactions with their families. Furthermore, these are routine moments that provide a high level of accessibility to children. Not only can children know easily when and how they will occur, but even young children can often participate in these routines in meaningful ways by helping to set the table at dinnertime or choose their own book to read with a parent at bedtime.

A special kind of a routine, a ritual, adds an additional layer to the significance of predictable family experiences. Rituals are routines that also impart a sense of family identity and promote connection among family members. Rituals give children a growing sense of themselves as a member of a greater whole which promotes positive developmental outcomes. In addition, the joy that families experience inside of rituals together can leave an “emotional residue” that children keep with them to cope during stressful times. When times are uncertain, and children experience worry or sadness, rituals provide the internal sense that they are not alone and have a balance in their lives of positive and negative experiences.

How parents can adapt routines during the current crisis

Many parents are struggling to adapt their children's routines in the current crisis. Without school, family, and regular activities, parents are aware their children still need structure. Here are some tips to incorporate the most significant features of routines into your children's current lives.



1

Routines and Rules

As described, children most need to know what to expect each day at home. One way to do that is by creating a schedule. However, for some children, overly defined schedules may increase anxiety, especially if the transitions between segments seem artificial. If you find a true schedule is not working for your family, try a morning meeting during which priorities are set for the day and general timeframes are created for blocks of activity. Keep in mind that doing just a couple of things each day in the same way to create anchors is the most important thing for young children. For example, make sure at least one meal, and preferably the same meal each day, occurs at about the same time and is a chance for all family members (as is possible) to sit together without distractions. Think carefully about household rules and while you may be tempted at this time to relax expectations, be firm with rules that matter most in the long-term for your family. For example, you may decide to relax rules about how neat the house is or how much TV your children are allowed to watch, but rules about safety and kindness should never be unclear to children.



2

Relationships

Children don't need perfect parents to thrive, but they do need predictable parents. While you may be spending lots of time overall with your children right now, consider how predictable your focused attention is for them. Their development is best supported by fewer but more focused moments of positive interaction than attempts at sustaining distracted attention throughout the day. Likewise, managing your own worries in order to support their mental health does not mean suppressing your feelings. Rather, think about your own stress and coping as a complete loop. Show your children that they can count on you to feel what you feel and transparently adopt healthy coping strategies to manage those feelings when they come up.



3

Rituals

Many families already have rituals in place without realizing their power: Taco Tuesdays, Sunday church services, and Saturday movie nights. Rituals can occur daily or less frequently. If you have a good one in place, take this opportunity while at home to observe if it has an impact on your family. Do you notice a family connection occurring during this time? You may also take this time to invent new family rituals. It is key that they occur at the same time and place, that they involve all family members, and that they impart a positive emotional connection. Research shows that rituals buffer the impact of stress and trauma on mental health. Furthermore, rituals that connect children to previous generations may be particularly impactful. It's a great time to reinvent a special ritual from your own childhood with your children.

Salvador Minuchin, a famous family therapy scholar, said, "Only the family, society's smallest unit, can change and yet maintain enough continuity to rear children who will not be 'strangers in a strange land,' who will be rooted firmly enough to grow and adapt." Each family has the capacity to support their children's adaptation with positive routines and powerful connections.