



TIP SHEET:

Parenting through COVID-19

Parenting has dramatically shifted in recent months as families are learning to navigate a new way of life. Whether parents previously worked outside the home or inside the home, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many to take on new roles while managing the ever changing emotions and stressors of the family. Children may be asking when they will go back to school, why they can't see their family and friends, and fearing the sight of people wearing masks all around them. Older children and teenagers may increasingly challenge family rules as their restricted freedoms continue.

It is important to keep in mind that children and teenagers are very observant and will likely pick up on their caregivers' emotions, actions, and responses during times of change and stress. Here are some tips on how to mindfully parent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Talk to your children about the Coronavirus

Children and teenagers are smart, and much more aware than adults tend to realize. They are hearing conversations about the virus and are cognizant of the many and profound changes it has caused. If they are old enough to ask questions, give simple short answers just to the questions being asked. This is good advice on any subject.

Address fears open and honestly

Children pick up on stress and emotional changes occurring in the home, so it is best to openly acknowledge and address fears at an age-appropriate level.

Acknowledge your child's feelings

Recognize your child's feelings and calmly assure them that their feelings are valid and that you acknowledge them. This will remind them they are safe and loved. Then help them problem solve through the situation. For example, "I see that you are upset you can't play with your friends. Would you like to call them and talk to them today?" With teenagers, acknowledge their losses and help them think through creative alternatives.

Be aware of catastrophic thinking

It is easy during this time to be convinced that every cough or sniffle is the start of the coronavirus taking its toll on your family. This ruminating thought process can increase stress throughout the whole family, making everyone more susceptible to illness. Check trusted resources (see resources at the end of this document) for common symptoms children experience with coronavirus and when to seek medical attention.

Try to maintain consistent routines

Children always do best when they know what to expect and when. Having a consistent schedule for your day will help them cope during periods of transition and stress.

- Have a regular nap and bedtime routine that occurs at the same time each day
- Plan meals for the same time each day
- Pick a time of day for school work and play



Set Limits

Adults and children alike are experiencing new struggles and complex emotions. Younger children may begin “acting out” or demonstrating behavioral regression (e.g., thumb sucking, hitting, demanding bottles, throwing food, etc.) while older kids may become more irritable and quick to anger.

- Redirect behaviors or provide distraction
- Provide your direct attention to them and acknowledge their needs
- Give rewards and privileges when good behaviors are practiced (a movie, specific treat, game time, etc.)
- Be consistent with “time-out” or “reset-time.” If a known family boundary is crossed and your family incorporates these practices, continue to use them. Let children know what they did was wrong, remove them from the situation, and sit with them for a pre-set amount of time.
- Readily give affection and affirmation. We all need human connection, so spend extra time giving hugs and holding your young children who will let you.
- Be flexible with your older children and teenagers when you can be. Acknowledge their frustrations and losses with empathy, but hold firm to rules you have in place to keep your family safe.

Get outside if you can

Being outside in nature and spending quality family time can help serve as a “reset” for everyone. If possible, plan for a consistent time each day that is designated family time so children know what to expect, everyone engages in physical activity, and there is minimal disruption from work. Consider taking mindful nature walks as a family – using all five senses, take turns listening to and gently noting present moment sounds, then turning to sights, smells, or the feel of sun on your face.

Caring for Yourself

Be compassionate and kind to yourself

Parenting can be challenging in the best of circumstances, let alone in the middle of a pandemic. Each day something new will arise. Show yourself compassion, and talk to yourself the way you would talk to a best friend. During difficult times, Dr. Kristin Neff, self-compassion researcher, author, and Associate Professor of Human Development and Culture at the University of Texas at Austin, suggests reciting the following to yourself: “This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life. May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I give myself the compassion I need.” Forgive yourself for your mistakes, and at the end of each day, identify one thing you feel you did well, and be proud of yourself for all you are doing.



PACE yourself

Many of us are growing in understanding that this pandemic isn't a sprint, and like parenthood itself, it's more like a marathon that requires pacing. The good news is that as a parent or caretaker, you can learn to be more resilient and to replenish and sustain your vitality. PACE is a mindfulness acronym that can be used to help you stay in the present moment and support good, sustainable self-care.

Pause throughout your day and take a few mindful breaths.
Offer yourself and others some grace.

Acknowledge feelings and losses.

Compassionately direct your energy toward things you can impact and that are in your control. Then, as best you can, let go of the rest.

Engage with others. Ask for support, help and ideas. If you have a co-parent, deeply listen to their concerns and offer support. Share resources with other parents and caregivers.

Calm and befriend your nervous system daily

Remember to “put on your own mask first” before tending to others. Identify and schedule something to do everyday to help you de-stress and enhance your personal wellbeing. Visit the Center's [Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing website](#) for resources and wellbeing tips, including mindfulness practices and guided meditations.

Take a day off

Some days will be harder than others. If you are able to take a day off for yourself, allow yourself to do this. With all the uncertainty in the world around us, we put more pressure on ourselves to show up and be available for everyone at all times. This is not sustainable for the long term. So if you can, take a day off and allow yourself to slow down and rejuvenate, even if that just means spending time reading what you want to, watching what you want to, engaging in a hobby, taking a long walk or bike ride, or gardening, for example. If you cannot take a full day, try to find any amount of time just for you.

Consider ways to shift from feeling alone to being connected

Reaching out for help can feel nearly impossible, especially when we as parents are immersed in a challenging moment, situation, or cycle of stress and concern for/with our children. We may be accustomed to going it alone and find it hard to let another person into our self-sufficient style. We might be worried that a call for assistance will be rejected or not provide what we think we need. In the moment you pause, try to consider who or what might be a source of support, new insight, maybe even a portal for fresh ways of being/doing. The resources that follow are bridges to people and organizations that care deeply about the wellbeing of parents, children, and families.

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Resources for Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Wellbeing

[Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing](#)

Healthcare information

[Healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/>

Parenting Arrangements (Co-Parenting, Single Parenting, Adoptive Parenting)

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Co-Parenting-through-COVID-19.aspx>

<https://singleparentadvocate.org/>

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parent_teenager.pdf

Parenting in a Pandemic

https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Positive-Parenting-and-COVID-19_10-Tips.aspx

Parenting in the Time of COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

How to Talk to Children about COVID-10 and its Impact - Age Specific Examples

<https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2555/2020/03/Talking-to-children-about-the-impact-of-COVID-19.pdf>

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Parenting During Coronavirus

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/parenting-during-coronavirus-you-are-enough>

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Unicef - Parenting Tips

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips>

Resilient Parents - Online Course

<https://courses.shambhala.com/resilient-parenting-1/?siteID=8zXvVsWE170-s9NiuyZbGc6SXUg3MV-sU2w>

UMN Extension

<https://extension.umn.edu/news/parenting-during-covid-19>

How to Keep Children's Stress from Becoming Trauma

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/well/family/coronavirus-children-stress-parents.html?searchResultPosition=1>

Sesame Street's COVID-19 Resources Initiative, "Caring for Each Other."

<https://www.sesamestreet.org/caring>

Additional Selected Resources

Minnesota Department of Health:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/basics.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP)

<http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/>

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Mental and Behavioral Health

NAMI Minnesota Mental Health Crisis Resources in Minnesota

<https://namimn.org/support/resources/crisis-resources/>

Adult Mental Health Crisis Response Phone Numbers

<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/health-care/adult-mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp>

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

<https://save.org/>

Volunteer Opportunities

Hands On Twin Cities

https://www.handsontwincities.org/need/?s=1&need_init_id=2955

Food Insecurity

Seond Harvest Heartland

<https://www.2harvest.org/who--how-we-help/services-and-programs/services/food-bank.html>

Minnesota Food Pantries

<https://www.foodpantries.org/st/minnesota>

Child Abuse and Neglect

Childhelp Hotline

<https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>

Minnesota Child Protection Agencies

<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/children-and-families/services/child-protection/contact-us/>

Domestic Violence

Domestic abuse/harassment resource sheet

http://www.mncourts.gov/Documents/2/Public/Protective_Orders/PHONE_NUMBER_RESOURCE_SHEET.pdf

Cornerstone

<https://cornerstonemn.org/>

Financial and Housing Resources

NAMI Financial and Housing Resources

<https://namimn.org/support/resources/financial-housing-resources/>

