

[parenting](#)

Parenting During Coronavirus

Parenting has always been tough, but home schooling, working from home, and all the financial uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 has made it even tougher. These parenting tips can help you cope.



The unique stresses facing parents during COVID-19

With many schools and workplaces closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, many of us have found ourselves dealing with a new, and often very stressful, family situation. As well as having to work from home and run the household, you're likely also trying to keep your

kids on track with their virtual school work—all while enduring the restrictions of social distancing and even being cut off from the support of friends and loved ones. With the whole family often occupying the same space day after day, the strain can seem unrelenting. If you or your spouse have been furloughed or lost your source of income, the financial pressure can add even more stress. Left unchecked, that can be a recipe for [burnout](#).

As a parent at this time, it's easy to feel that you have so many roles to fulfill that you can't possibly perform any of them well. But it's important to remind yourself that this is a unique situation, a global health emergency that none of us have had to face before. Don't beat yourself up if you're not functioning at your usual standard. This can apply to your quality of work, your upkeep of the home, or your ability to keep your kids focused on their schoolwork. By going easy on yourself and following these tips for maintaining a sense of balance, you can keep your stress levels in check and make each day a little easier for your family—and for yourself.

Helping your kids with online classes and schoolwork

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown many of us into the role of de facto homeschool teacher. In addition to all your other responsibilities, you may be finding it difficult to keep your children on track or helping them with assignments, especially if they're in different grades. Keep in mind that this is a stressful time for kids as well, and that it's normal for them to regress or act out in ways they normally wouldn't. Going easy on your kids can help reduce their stress levels as well as your own.

[\[Read: Coronavirus Anxiety: Coping with Stress, Fear, and Worry\]](#)

Join forces with other parents. Reach out safely or via phone, email, or social media and exchange tips for keeping kids focused and engaged. Depending on the restrictions in your area, you may also want to organize a virtual activity or study group, which has the added bonus of providing social interaction for your child. Collaborating with other parents may help you feel less isolated as well.

Connect with your child's teacher. Remember, they're also getting through this by trial and error. If your child's school is still closed, be honest about what is working with home tutoring and what isn't. Your child's teacher has a good understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses, so they may be able to help you come up with a more individualized learning plan.

Create a learning routine. A routine gives kids a sense of normalcy during an otherwise [uncertain time](#). But you don't have to go crazy with color-coded schedules if that's not your style. Just create a general outline that you think you can maintain on most days that still leaves room for flexibility and down-time. If possible, try to designate a workspace for each member of the family.

Set goals—and celebrate their completion. Since so much has been stripped from our everyday lives, having something to look forward to can help kids stay motivated. Setting up small rewards, like watching an episode of a favorite TV show, can help them tackle that unpleasant math assignment. Get the whole family in on it. If you all set a few goals and plan breaks together, your kids will see that you're a team.

Get creative with lessons. Doing a science experiment, for example, or cooking with measurements, can be a good way of bringing lessons to life. And consider your child's strengths. If they love to draw and write, now is a good time to set them free with pencils and paper.

Practice vulnerability (and encourage your kids to do the same)

Let's face it: these are less-than-ideal circumstances, and at some point, conflict at home is bound to happen. When you feel your frustration starting to build, [take a time out](#) and try to separate yourself before the situation escalates. If you do lose your temper, wait for everyone to calm down and then apologize. Be honest with your kids and let them know when you're feeling overwhelmed. At the same time, encourage them to be honest about their feelings and frustrations.

Dealing with your child's fears and stress

After watching the news or overhearing an adult conversation regarding the pandemic, young children might get scared. COVID-19 has changed their schooling, friendships, and normal routine, so it should be a top priority to address your child's fears and reassure their physical and emotional well-being.

Talk at an age-appropriate level. If your child is young, don't volunteer too much information, as this could cause their imagination to run wild. Instead, try to answer any questions they might have. It's okay not to know everything; if your child is older, help them

find accurate information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or World Health Organization (WHO).

Answer questions simply and honestly. If your child has questions about the pandemic, know that honesty is always the best policy. While you don't want to frighten young children, there's nothing wrong with talking about the need for taking safety precautions such as social distancing and washing their hands.

Be understanding. If you're forced to quarantine as a family, your child will be disappointed at not being able to see friends or visit with other family members. Be receptive to this. Explain to them that you understand their disappointment, and you are missing out on friendships and special occasions as well.

Arrange virtual playdates. Offer an alternative to in-person playdates via the Internet. Set your children up on video conferencing services, like Skype or Zoom, so they can keep in contact with close friends and grandparents, for example.

Give extra love and affection. This is a stressful time for all of us and we could all benefit from extra affection. Your child will appreciate extra hugs and kisses.

Designate special one-on-one time. If everyone is at home with each other all the time, having one on one time with each child is a great way to forge a closer bond. Have your child choose an activity for the two of you to participate in together.

Find things to be grateful about. Each evening, share with your child one fun or positive thing you experienced that day and encourage them to do the same. It could be a work or school accomplishment, a home repair, or something as simple as witnessing a beautiful sunset. It may sound corny, but acknowledging gratitude and positive experiences can provide a [respite from negative thinking](#) and really boost your family's mood.

Keeping healthy routines

As the pandemic drags on, it can be easy to neglect your normal daily routines. But structure and consistency are important for kids. Maintaining regular mealtimes and bedtimes, for example, can help your child feel safe and secure.

Establish healthy new routines. As you readjust to a new normal, you may need to establish new daily schedules for your kids. Even if things like bedtimes have changed

without school every day, try to be consistent and follow the same schedule each day. Make time for activities such as exercise, family dinners, and household chores as well as time for your child to socialize with friends, whether that's done safely in person or online.

Follow safety advice. With different areas facing different restrictions, it's important to follow the advice of trustworthy sources such as the CDC, WHO, and your local public health authorities. Playgrounds, schoolyards, and parks are all high-contact areas where your children should follow your instructions about keeping themselves and others safe. That may mean wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing, and regularly washing their hands.

Reinforce the importance of hygiene and handwashing. Hand washing might have been a boring, mundane task in 2019, but now it can be a life-saving measure. Get your child into the routine of washing their hands every time they've been outside or come into contact with other people. To encourage the habit in young children, make up a song to the melody of one of your child's favorites and sing it together while they wash their hands.

[\[Read: How to Cope with Traumatic Events like Coronavirus\]](#)

Practice what you preach. Follow social distancing and other safety protocols yourself, treat others with respect, and protect the vulnerable. Young children are impressionable and will mimic your behavior, so make sure you set a positive example.

The importance of regular bedtimes

It's normal for children to experience [sleep problems](#) during times of great stress. Some may have trouble falling asleep, others, especially very young children, may be anxious about being separated from mom and dad. Maintaining a consistent bedtime and regular nightly routine can help address these problems.

- Ensure your child goes to sleep and wakes up at the same time each day.
- Establish a nightly bedtime routine, where the lights are dimmed and your child can unwind and relax.
- Make sure all screens are turned off at least one hour before bedtime as the blue light from these devices can interfere with your child's sleep-wake cycle. Try reading to your child or listening to an audiobook together, instead.
- Offer extra physical affection in the form of hugs and kisses at night if your child needs reassurance.

- After you have put your kids to bed, it's important as a parent that you take the time at night to unwind and relax yourself. Getting a good night's sleep is just as important for you, as well.

Managing behavior problems

Often, when children misbehave, it's a reaction to the amount of stress they're under and a way to vent their frustration. Try to keep this in mind when acting as a disciplinarian during these difficult times—and do your best to remain calm. Start by [managing your own stress levels](#) through exercise, a healthy lifestyle, making time for fun, and adopting a regular relaxation practice. The calmer and more relaxed you are, the better you'll be able to handle your child's reactions to stress.

These positive disciplinary tips can also help:

- **Redirect your child.** If your child is misbehaving, redirect them to another activity, such as playing outside or reading a book. As a parent, you can sometimes tell when your younger child is beginning to get restless. Take the opportunity to distract them with an interesting task or a fun game and you can curtail bad behavior before it starts.
- **Take a breath.** There are plenty of ways to [relieve stress in the moment](#) when you feel like you are losing patience with your child. For example, take deep breaths and count to ten to allow yourself to calm down. Then you can respond to your child's behavior in a calmer and more positive manner.
- **Give your child a creative consequence.** For a timely example, if your child goes outside without a mask, ask them to draw a picture of a child wearing a mask or a picture of your family with masks on. Creative consequences simultaneously engage your child while also teaching them that their behavior was wrong.
- **Reward good behaviors**, such as doing well on a school assignment, making their bed, taking out the trash, or getting along with their siblings. In normal circumstances, you might not reward this kind of behavior, but during this stressful time, nothing positive should go unrecognized.
- **Never yell at or spank your child.** Losing your temper in this way will only damage your relationship and impact your child's sense of safety and security.
- **Sometimes, it may be best to do nothing.** Ignoring bad behavior can be an extremely effective tool when trying to get your child to stop doing something. When a young child is looking for attention, not giving it to them can make them realize that

they should either stop or find a more respectful way of finding attention.

Monitoring your child's social media use

At this time of social distancing and isolation, many of us—and our kids—are relying on the Internet and social media to keep in touch with friends and family and up to date on the news. While it has many positive aspects, social media can also negatively affect your child's levels of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty.

If you're worried about your child's social media use, you may be tempted to simply limit their access to their phone or other devices. But that can create further problems, separating your child from their friends when they need them most. Instead, there are other ways to monitor their online activities and help them [use social media in more responsible ways](#).

Parenting teens

Dealing with the pandemic can be especially tough on adolescents, who are missing out on key moments in their young lives. Many are spending long periods separated from their friends and are missing important school events such as exams, dances, and graduations. While the [teen years are always difficult](#), your child may be even more angsty, moody, or defiant at the moment than is normal for their age.

Of course, connecting with teenagers is rarely easy. You may despair over how much your teen withdraws from you or how hard it is to communicate with them, but that doesn't mean they don't still need your attention, advice, and love. When trying to get your teen to open up and talk to you, keep the conversation light at first. Stick to topics you know they'll enjoy, such as their favorite artists, sports teams, movies, authors, or friends rather than subjects where you'll likely disagree. Once you're chatting, you can move on to more difficult subjects such as the pandemic and other things going on in their life.

[\[Read: Dealing with Uncertainty During the Coronavirus Pandemic\]](#)

Spending extra time with your teen can help them to open up and confide in you. Try:

- **Cooking and eating together.** [Cooking](#) one of your teen's favorite meals with them offers an opportunity to talk about what's going on in their life. Try to schedule dinners around the table with no distractions from phones, the TV, or other devices so you can

talk as a family.

- **Gardening together.** Gardening is a great way to keep a tight bond, as it's a fairly docile activity that gives time to talk and strengthen a parent-child bond.
- **Playing sports or exercising together.** Many teenagers love to [engage themselves physically](#), whether it be time spent playing sports, working out in the gym, or going on a run. Try shooting hoops, kicking a soccer ball, throwing a frisbee, or playing golf or tennis. When done together, it proves to be a great source of stress relief as well as an opportunity to bond.

Talking to your teen about COVID-19

While young children may be frightened about the pandemic, older kids and teens are more likely to be annoyed by the restrictions it brings. Spending time with their peers is extremely important to teenagers, so they may rebel against social distancing guidelines. If you're finding it difficult to enforce the rules or your interactions always feel like a power struggle, don't despair. There are ways to get through this time without becoming a drill sergeant or turning your home into a war zone.

[\[Read: Coronavirus Mental Health Toolkit: Getting Through the COVID Winter \]](#)

Explain why social distancing and other rules are important. Teenagers tend to feel invincible at the best of times. During this pandemic, they know that the virus may not pose as much of a risk to them as it does to older people. But that doesn't mean that they can't spread the disease and cause extreme suffering to others. Explain that even though they feel fine, they could still be asymptomatic carriers and pass the virus on to those most at risk, including their own grandparents or other family members with underlying health conditions.

Empathize with their frustrations. Be empathetic about the things that they've been forced to give up due to the pandemic. Validate their feelings and listen without trying to convince them that they'll be fine or reminding them that others have it worse. Sharing your own disappointments and frustrations will put you on the same team. If restrictions in your area make it difficult for your kids to see their friends in person, encourage them to be creative with how they interact virtually.

Encourage mindfulness

Like you, it's unlikely your teen has experienced uncertainty on this type of scale before.

They may fear for their future, especially if they're missing college admission tests or summer activities expected to help them with applications or scholarships. Older children may worry if they'll be able to return to college in the fall.

[Practicing mindfulness meditation](#) encourages you to experience all these difficult emotions without judgment. In these difficult times, it can benefit both you and your teenage kids. Remind them that it's okay to feel stressed and anxious, but they should try not to dwell on worst-case scenarios. After all, even in the best of times, an element of uncertainty is still an unavoidable part of life.

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[Coronavirus Parenting: Managing Anger and Frustration](#) - Gives tips on how to handle common scenarios during this time. (Child Mind Institute)

[Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips to Keep the Calm at Home](#) - Help children feel safe by keeping healthy routines, managing their behavior, and building resilience. (Healthychildren.org)

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[Parenting in the age of COVID-19: Coping with six common challenges](#) - Answers to six common parenting challenges. (Boston Children's Hospital)

[Being "Good Enough" Right Now is OK](#) - It's not possible to be a really good parent now, so aim for good enough. (Anxiety and Depression Association of America)

[Co-Parenting Through COVID-19: Putting Your Children First](#) - Parenting at this time following a separation or divorce. (Healthychildren.org)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) parenting tips](#) - Expert tips to help you deal with COVID-19 parenting challenges.(UNICEF)