

Tips for Parenting Well in the Early Days of COVID-19

A little preparation can go a long way toward happy families in small quarters.

Posted Mar 19, 2020

Everything feels topsy turvy for families right now. Parents and their children are facing unknown periods of time together at home and everyone's emotions are high. Here are some tips for getting through these first days of the limited physical contact that is required to stop the spread of COVID19.

Don't take your children's disappointment and frustrations personally. Greet their feelings with [empathy](#) and help them work through emotional upset. Just like the grown people in the world, children are being confronted with ample change and loss these days. With spring break plans cancelled and school and extracurricular offerings being put on hold indefinitely, the littler people in our homes are being plagued by lots of big feelings. Children, and teens in particular, are likely to say things like "I wish I wasn't stuck here" or "Our house sucks."

As much as you can, don't take their feelings or statements personally. Instead, hear them/receive them as opportunities to express empathy. Responding with statements like, "I absolutely understand your disappointment, this is really hard." or "I can imagine how difficult it is to consider all this time without your friends and activities. I get how totally disappointing that is." will go a long way toward building connection with your children. Once you've heard them, offer opportunities for

working through their big feelings. Talking, journaling, and even drawing how they feel can be a huge help.

Pick battles well. Don't set limits on everything. Be flexible. If you're going to ask your children to be moderate with screens, consider limiting the restrictions you place on other things. The goal is to find a good, moderate space with lots of flexibility in all of the areas where conflict often lives. Setting limits on sleep, exercise, food, and screens in excessive ways, all at the same time, will never work. Choose what is most urgent and important for each of your children and work at that, relaxing other restrictions appropriately. Get healthy norms in place in one area at a time, adding on once each is set.

Lead with flexibility and grace and without hypocrisy. On even the most easy-going days of home life, figuring out the appropriate balance of [screen time](#) and embodied life can be difficult. With the bulk of our connectedness, entertainment, and educational/vocational lives being moved online this will be an even bigger challenge. Over time, having structure and clear guidelines about tech time alongside rich offerings for embodied engagement will become increasingly important. In these early days, however, it is almost more important to help everyone work through their emotions and settle into the new realities than to tend to setting new norms. Remember that our children are watching us. If we are tied to our devices for news and information it is crucial that we not [shame](#) them for their use of tech to stay connected.

Schedule regular family meetings and keep them. Post a piece of paper or white board in a prominent space where family members can list agenda items throughout the week. Assign a different person to be the moderator of each

meeting. When there are consistent, predetermined times for people to bring up needs and review what is and isn't working, it can take the pressure off the day to day need of resolving difficult situations in the moment, when emotions are high. Keep these meetings even if there's nothing on the agenda. Call them to order, ask if there's anything that needs to be discussed, and see if anyone has ideas for improvements on how things are going. Do at least one thing at every family meeting that creates positivity. Serve massive ice cream sundaes. Get out old photos for everyone to laugh over. Play a song from your children's [childhood](#). Watch an old home movie.

article continues after advertisement

Create "zones" for working/schooling, recreation, and rest. With much of life being whittled down to home, it's easy to fall into "vacation mode," doing everything from our devices on the couches or beds intended for recreation and rest. To help us differentiate and make sure we are living balanced lives, it can be helpful to designate spaces for each activity. For example, perhaps the dining table is our work/school/eating space and the living room or t.v. room is our recreation space. Bedrooms are for rest. Setting time zones can be helpful as well, especially in the evenings when blue light from our screens can seriously disrupt our sleep. Doing this arbitrarily or in authoritarian manners has the potential to backfire, especially with teens. Make sure that everyone gets to help create the zones that will guide life in the next few weeks.

Create a "Regulation Corner/Space." It's inevitable that people are going to hit their limit and have days where interacting in cramped quarters will be difficult. Having a space that is preset with calming objects and that people know is a "give me space" zone can be a big help. Ask each family member what they need in

the space and make sure it's ready. Sensory things such as pillows and a heavy blanket, picture books, essential oil diffuser, kinetic sand, colored pencils and coloring pages, and a hand maneuvered game (such as rush hour) or simple building toys (such as legos) are great items to have at the ready. Model using this space for your children and remind them of it, gently, when needed.

Encourage movement and getting outside every day. Even in places where inclement weather makes it difficult to stay outside for long, it's important to breathe a bit of fresh air every day. Simply stepping outside for five or six deep breaths twice a day can make a huge impact on our mental and physical health. Similarly, movement, whether indoors or out, is crucial for our well being. Going up and down the stairs several times, playing catch inside with a foam ball, dancing, or, if you have the space, roller skating inside are all great options. If you can get outside and run around, or do laps in, the yard, that's even better.

Create a [gratitude](#) wall/window/mirror. Gather sticky notes, a large piece of paper, or washable or white board markers. Decide on a wall or a window or mirror on which to begin gathering words reflecting what you are grateful for. If using a wall, use the sticky notes, one per item you are grateful for, to create a mural of gratitude. If using a window or mirror, use the dry erase or washable markers to write on the surface. Encourage everyone to contribute.

Consider supporting local artists and musicians or creators of high quality content via family viewing evenings. We know that families will have plenty of movie nights in the coming weeks. When planning them, consider engaging high quality content that supports small, local, and independent creators. Many local artists

are offering streaming concerts for donations. Yo Yo Ma is offering daily live music on his social streams and many others are doing the same. The options are limitless. Practice [generosity](#) as a family by engaging these at least some of the time.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/deviced/202003/tips-parenting-well-in-the-early-days-covid-19>