

## MASTERING WORK FROM HOME CHALLENGES

Families across the world are adapting to the dramatic lifestyle changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents and care-givers are now faced with the daunting task of adjusting to the new reality, while being confined to their homes. Those who work from home wonder how to keep children occupied, how to make them feel safe, how to make sure they continue learning, and so on.

Working-From-Home while caring for kids or ailing elders can be very stressful. At the same time it's a tremendous opportunity to display skills such as problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion as we work through adjusting daily schedules, balancing work and domestic chores, getting creative about how we spend time, processing new information from authorities, and providing virtual support to friends and family members in novel ways. None of this is easy. But it's important to reassure children that they're safe, and that the situation will get better.

Remember, children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. Acknowledging some level of concern is ok. Taking the necessary steps to reduce the risk of illness is important. Teaching children preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

## PARENTING TIPS FOR LOCKDOWN TIMES

How does one work peacefully and productively in a home environment? Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. **Make rules and guidelines** in consultation with your partner and children.
2. **Prepare and share your schedule.** Tell everyone what you're working on, why it's important, and how much time you need. No matter how many items are on your to-do list, make sure it includes time for your kids.
3. **Communicate clearly.** Setting expectations is important. Tell them when you can help and when you cannot help. This applies to partners and parents too.
4. **Get up early** so you can get some work done before others wake up.
5. Take short, quick **naps**, whenever you can. That way, you'll make sure you get enough rest.
6. Take short breaks from work **to play or explore with the kids.** Tell them at the outset that you need to get back to work after 15 minutes. That way you get some exercise too. And your eyes are rested.

7. While you're playing with kids, **don't look at your phone** or answer messages. Give them undivided attention.
8. **Place your desk closer to your kids.** If you can still concentrate there's nothing like it.
9. Have a **bottle of milk ready** before meetings. If the baby wakes up or starts crying while you're busy, a bottle can be a godsend. The same goes for **snacks or treats for older kids.** Keep them ready and write a note on a piece of paper telling the kids where to find them. When they come along just hold up the paper instead of speaking.
10. Devise **sign language** for 'don't make noise', 'go away', 'go take a nap', 'take a bath', 'brush your teeth', 'wash your hands', 'open the door', 'please bring me a glass of water', and similar messages that you communicate to your kids every day. Ask them to suggest signs for each message. Practice using them when you're not on call. After a while the kids get used to it, so you can effectively use sign language when you in a net meeting.
11. **Hide half of all toys** and bring them out at appropriate intervals. Rotating toys preserves their novelty and stokes fresh interest.
12. **Prioritize your own mental and physical health.** Insist on ME-time.
13. Expect **conflict** to happen. Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. It can have healthy outcomes too.
14. **Forgive** your children and partner when they make mistakes. Forgive yourself too. Remember the old adage, 'To err is human, to forgive divine.'

## **PARENTING TIPS FOR LOCKDOWN TIMES - Useful Links**

*Life under lockdown - practical tips from the UN*

<https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/life-under-lockdown-practical-tips-un>

*8 tips to help comfort and protect children*

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

*6 strategies for teens facing a new (temporary) normal*

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

*10 things teens want to know about cyberbullying*

<https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying>

9 ways parents can work at home with kids – and actually get stuff done  
<https://www.care.com/c/stories/5289/how-to-work-from-home-with-kids/>

How to Master Working From Home—While Under Quarantine With Kids  
<https://www.parents.com/parenting/work/life-balance/how-to-master-being-a-work-at-home-mom/>

## COPING STRATEGIES

You can develop healthy ways of coping during a lockdown by spending time with loved ones, and trying to maintain normal routines for meals, exercise, and sleep. Explore some creative activities that include the entire family. Here are some samples:

- **Co-opt kids into your cooking routines.** Invent simple recipes together with available resources and try to cook it. Thinking of the kitchen as a laboratory to test new ideas can instill children with confidence to devise their own solutions to a problem, encourage independent thinking and develop problem-solving skills. Assign age-appropriate tasks.
- **Play Indoor Games Together.** Invent new rules and try new strategies for familiar games. It's amazing the way creative thinking can turn something that seems rigid (game rules) into an experiment in innovation.
- **Make videos together.** Create videos with children using your mobile phone. Engage in collaborative projects like creating stop motion videos. It requires story boarding, creativity, humor, and most of all patience.
- **Clean the House or Garden.** Rearranging can be great fun. Decorate your indoors differently with your children's help.
- **Familiarize children with household chores.** Teach them the proper use of gadgets like washing machines and dish-washers which they may not be handling regularly. (TV, frig and smart phones are their core competencies!)
- **Learn to draw a family tree.** First draw your nuclear family tree, then both of your parents, then your grandparents, and great grandparents. Keep expanding the tree with uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, etc. Try to familiarize the various members to your children. Try catching up with each member on FB, instagram, twitter, etc.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH CHILDREN

1. Make tin-can or paper-cup string telephones. Say hello!

2. Empty a matchbox and take turns filling it with lots of tiny objects.
3. List what you'd bring if you had to live on a desert island. Compare your lists and try to pick the 5 most useful items.
4. Dream up a make-believe animal and describe it. Draw it!
5. Draw something using only the letters in your name.
6. Go fishing—indoors—with paper fish with paper clips attached. Use a rod with a magnet on the end of the string.
7. Listen to audio books for kids. (e.g. Audible.com)
8. Sketch a shape and challenge your child to finish the drawing.
9. Put together your own puzzle by cutting up photos or postcards.
10. See who can build the highest block tower.
11. Put on blindfolds and do a taste-test of different random foods.
12. Draft a handwritten letter to a faraway relative.
13. Get coloring! Download free printable coloring pages.
14. Make paper boats.
15. Play leapfrog.
16. Create a stuffed-animal zoo and make 'habitats' in different rooms.
17. Play treasure hunt.
18. Kids love to paint, draw, make crazy creations with play-dough, write stories and design characters, as well as make up silly songs and compositions. Try to sit alongside them and play along. Finger-painting can be fun too!
19. Paint pre-made pottery. You can use plates, mugs, tiles, frames, bowls, or vases that are lying unused around the house.
20. Fancy dress – help your kids dress up as different characters, people, animals, trees, whatever. Use old clothes to design or stitch new outfits.

## **USEFUL LINKS FOR PLAY ACTIVITIES**

<https://www.learning4kids.net/play-activities-by-age/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/159244536799402955/>

<https://www.familyeducation.com/at-home-learning-resources-for-the-covid-19-outbreak>

<https://www.parentcircle.com/article/agewise-activities-to-improve-your-childs-focus/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/fine-motor-activities-for-babies-and-toddlers/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/34-creative-play-activities-for-babies-below-1-year/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/sensory-activities-for-babies-and-toddlers/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/art-projects-for-babies/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/8-fun-filled-activities-to-keep-toddlers-busy/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/nature-activities-for-toddlers/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/fun-easy-and-budget-friendly-montessori-activities-for-kids/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/activities-develop-attention-and-learning-children/>

<https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/30-indoor-and-outdoor-physical-activities-for-kids/>

<https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/top-30-activities-for-5-year-old-children/>

<https://www.whatdowedoallday.com/indoor-activities-for-kids/>

## **STAYING CALM AND OFFERING REASSURANCE**

- *Be a role model.* Children learn from your example.
- *Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19.* Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. Remind your child that your family is healthy, and you're going to do everything possible to keep loved ones safe and well. Have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings. Listen to their concerns and respond with truth and reassurance.
- *Explain social distancing.* Children don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with their friends. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Government, which include social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of infection is under control.
- *Establish and maintain a daily routine.* Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time.
- *Focus on the positive.* Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, or connect with nature and get some exercise. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually.
- *Demonstrate deep breathing.* It's a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children.
- *Identify projects that might help others.* This could include writing letters to neighbours or others who might be stuck at home alone, or to healthcare workers, sending positive messages over social media, or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform for younger children to hear.
- *Express lots of love and affection.*

## BASIC HYGIENE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- *Practice daily hygiene.* Encourage your child to practice some simple steps to prevent spreading the virus.
- *Wash your hands* multiple times a day for 20 seconds. Singing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Happy Birthday” twice is about 20 seconds.
- Compliment your children when they *use a kerchief/tissue* or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Teach them the importance of throwing away used tissues immediately after sneezing or coughing.
- *Handshakes and hugs* need to be limited to immediate family members, at least for now.
- *Foster a sense of control.* Offering guidance on what children can do to prevent infection gives them a sense of control, which in turn reduces anxiety.
- *Build the immune system.* Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly. This will help them develop a robust immune system to fight off illness.

## TELEVISION, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND FAKE NEWS

- Parents/guardians should *monitor television, internet, and social media viewing*—both for themselves and their children. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- *Dispel rumors and inaccurate information.* Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may be false or skewed. Older children, in particular, may be accessing a great deal of information online and from friends. Talk to your children about credible and unreliable sources.
- *Provide alternatives to TV and internet.* Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.

## TAKE TIME TO TALK

- *Let your children's questions guide you.* Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details. Often, children don't talk about their concerns because they're confused or don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear and insecurity.

- *Correct misinformation.* Children often imagine situations worse than reality. Offering developmentally appropriate facts can help them understand the situation better. Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces.
- *Explain simple safety steps.* Demonstrate and practice proper hand-washing, mask-wearing and social distancing.
- *Encourage kids to verbalize their thoughts and feelings.* Be a good listener!

### KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE-APPROPRIATE

- **Small children** - Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs, such as washing hands, using hand sanitizer and so on.
- **Children aged 5-10 years** - This age group may be more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent the virus from spreading.
- **Children above 10 years** - Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to credible sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.

### STAY CONNECTED TO SCHOOL

- Locate learning resources. Take advantage of the online platforms currently offering free learning opportunities.
- Stay in touch. Find out how the school is communicating with families and students. Check with your children, particularly older ones, if they are receiving information directly.
- Connect with school staff. Reach out to your child's teacher if you have concerns about their coping and keeping up with assignments or activities.

### HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH STRESS

- Children may respond to stress in different ways, such as being more clingy, anxious, withdrawing, angry or agitated, bedwetting etc.

- Listen to your children, speak kindly and reassure them.
- Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention. During difficult times they need it more.
- Make opportunities for the children to play and relax.
- Try and keep children close to their parents and family. Avoid separating children and their care-givers as far as possible. If separation occurs (e.g. hospitalization) ensure regular contact (e.g. via phone) and re-assurance.
- Give kids space to share their fears. It's natural for kids to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let your child know that kids don't seem to get as sick as adults. Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them.
- Be aware of how your kids get news and information, especially older kids who go online. Point them to age-appropriate content so they don't end up finding news shows or outlets that scare them or have incorrect information.
- Give your children specific things they can do to feel in control. Teach kids that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often can help them stay strong and healthy. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading to others. Be a good role model and let your kids see you washing your hands often!
- Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy. Young kids might be reassured to know that hospitals and doctors are well equipped to treat people who get sick.
- Put news stories in context. If they ask, explain that death from the virus is still rare, despite what they might hear. Watch the news with them so you can filter what they hear.
- Kids and teens often worry more about family and friends than themselves. For example, if kids hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Letting them call or Skype with older relatives can help them feel reassured about loved ones.
- Let your kids know it's normal to feel stressed out at times. Everyone does. Recognizing these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience.



## TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT CORONA VIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

World attention is currently focused on measures to mitigate the transmission and economic effect of the novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In this situation, media and social conversations are entirely dominated by the outbreak, and children are exposed to large amounts of information and high levels of stress and anxiety in the adults around them. Simultaneously, children are experiencing substantial changes to their daily routine and social infrastructure.

Effective communication about COVID 19 is important for the psychological health of your children, big and small. Today children and young people account for 42% of our world's population.

Children might find it difficult to understand what they are seeing online or on TV or hearing from other people about the pandemic. So they can be particularly vulnerable to feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry *more*. But having an open, supportive discussion with your children can help them understand, cope and even make a positive contribution for others.

Parents often avoid talking about difficult feelings and events. However, research shows that even children as young as 2 years are aware of the changes around them. Children are well tuned to adults' emotional states. They feel threatened by unpredictable behavior or sudden changes, resulting in a state of anxiety. While smaller children may cry or even throw a tantrum, older kids and adolescents may exhibit challenging behaviours such as acting out or arguing.

Children need honest information about changes within their family. When information is not forthcoming, they try to make sense of the situation on their own. Sensitive communication about life-threatening illness is crucial for the psychological wellbeing of the child.

### **Here are some Dos and Don'ts:**

*1. Take your cues from your child.* Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the corona virus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies. Follow your child's lead. Some kids may want to spend time talking. Focus on helping your child feel safe, but be truthful. Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in.

*2. Ask open questions and listen.* Start by inviting your children to talk about the issue. Find out what they already know. Ask questions geared to your child's age level. For older kids, you might ask, "Are people in school talking about corona virus? What are they saying?" For younger children, you could say, "Have you heard grownups talking about a new sickness that's going around?" This gives you a chance to learn how much kids know — and to find out if they're hearing the wrong information.

3. *Try to gauge their level of anxiety* by watching their body language, tone of voice, etc. Drawing, stories and other activities may help to open up a discussion. Don't minimize or avoid their concerns. Acknowledge their feelings and assure them it's natural to feel scared about these things. Make sure they understand that they can talk to you and their teachers whenever they like.

4. *Communicating with younger children* should not solely rely on simplification of language or ideas. You also need to consider the children's comprehension of illness and causality. A child in the 4-7 age group may be substantially influenced by magical thinking, and an innocent belief that thoughts, wishes, or unrelated actions can cause external events. Adults must make sure the children are not blaming themselves or feeling that the illness is a punishment for previous bad behaviour.

5. *Be honest. Explain the truth in a child-friendly way.* Tell them what is going on. Tell them what can happen if one of them falls ill, why quarantine is necessary, why we need to see a doctor, why we need to get admitted in a hospital, how doctors and nurses look after us and help us get better, and so on. Speak calmly and reassuringly. Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have a cold or the flu. Kids pick up on it when parents worry. So when you discuss corona-related news use a calm voice and try not to sound upset. Children have a right to truthful information about what's going on in the world, but adults also have a responsibility to keep them safe from distress. Use age-appropriate language, watch their reactions, and be sensitive to their level of anxiety. Remember kids don't need to know every little thing. For example, when a two-year-old asks why grandma is not visiting these days, we *don't* say: "We're staying away from Grandma because we could get her infected and she's not strong enough to withstand it." Instead we can say: "We won't see Grandma this week but we'll see her soon!"

6. If you can't answer their questions, don't guess. Use it as an opportunity to *explore the answers together*. Websites of international organizations like UNICEF and WHO are credible sources of information. Explain that some information online may not be accurate. Tell kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open.

8. We often want to know how their children are feeling, but we don't set an example by *sharing some of our own feelings*. We often use technical or factual language in an attempt to minimize our children's distress. Hiding your emotions might leave children anxious about your emotional state. They may avoid sharing their own concerns in an attempt to protect you. This will leave them to cope with these difficult feelings alone.

9. *Show them how to protect themselves and their friends.* One of the best ways to keep children safe from corona virus and other diseases is to simply encourage regular hand washing. You can also show children how to cover a cough or a sneeze with their elbow. Explain that it's best not to get too close to people who have those symptoms. Ask them to let you know if they start to feel like they have a fever, cough or are having difficulty breathing.

6. *Offer Reassurance.* Children may seriously worry that they'll catch the virus. They may start believing they're in imminent danger. You can help them cope with the stress by making opportunities for them to play and relax. If you are experiencing an outbreak in your area, remind your children that most people who do have corona virus don't get very sick, and that lots of adults are working hard to keep your family safe. It's helpful to reassure your child about how rare the corona virus actually is (the flu is much more common) and that kids actually seem to have milder symptoms. If your child does feel unwell, explain that they have to stay at home/at the hospital because it is safer for them and their friends. Reassure them that you know it's hard (maybe scary or even boring) at times, but that following the rules will help keep everyone safe.

7. *Check if they are Experiencing or Spreading Stigma.* Explain that corona virus has nothing to do with what someone looks like, where they are from, what language they speak or what religion they follow. Remind your children that everyone deserves to be safe. Bullying is always wrong, and we should each do our part to spread kindness and support each other.

8. *Talk About the Helpers.* It's important for children to know that people are helping each other with acts of kindness and generosity. Share stories of health workers, scientists and young people, among others, who are working to stop the outbreak and keep the community safe. It can be comforting to know that people are taking action.

9. *Focus on what you're doing to stay safe.* Kids feel reassured when you emphasize the safety precautions you're taking. They feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe. Show them how to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom. Many kids actually enjoy this task.

10. *Talk about current events* with your kids often. Ask questions: What do you think about these events? How do you think these things happen? Such questions also encourage conversation about non-news topics. Use talking about corona-virus as a way to help kids learn about their bodies, like how the immune system fights off disease.

11. *Deal with your own anxiety.* If you notice that you're feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions. You'll be able to help your kids better if you're coping, too. It helps them to know you're calm and in control. If you're feeling anxious or upset, take time for yourself and reach out to other family, friends and trusted people in your community. Make some time to do things that help you relax and recuperate.

## **TIPS FOR NURTURING AND PROTECTING CHILDREN**

As schools closed and workplaces offer work from home options to prevent the spread of the new corona virus, parents everywhere are struggling to keep children healthy and occupied. Here are some tips to manage stress and keep the peace:

**1. Keep Routines in place.** Consistency and structure are calming during times of stress. Kids, especially younger ones or those who are anxious, benefit from knowing what's going to happen and when. Experts agree that setting and sticking to a regular schedule is important. The schedule can mimic a school schedule, changing activities at predictable intervals, and alternating periods of study and play. Kids should get up, eat and go to bed at their normal times. Setting a timer will help.

**2. Make plans.** In the face of events that are scary and largely out of our control, it's important to be proactive about what you *can* control. Making plans helps you visualize the near future. What can your family do that would be fun outside? What are favorite foods you can cook during this time? Make lists that kids can add to. Seeing you solve problems in response to this crisis can be reassuring for kids.

**3. Be Creative about new activities and exercise.** Incorporate new activities into your routine, like doing a puzzle or having family game time in the evening. Build in activities that help everyone get some exercise (without contact with other kids or things touched by other kids).

**4. Limit consumption of News.** Staying informed is important, but it's a good idea to limit news and social media that have the potential to feed anxiety. Turn the TV off. Unfollow friends or co-workers who are prone to sharing panic-inducing posts. Follow accounts that share positive content. Fix specific times for browsing the internet.

**5. Relax Boundaries.** When a kid asks for more time on the mobile phones, say 'Yes!' Relax your boundaries. Allow kids more TV time. You can explain to them that once school reopens, the old boundaries will bounce back.

**6. Stay in Touch Virtually.** Socializing plays an important role in regulating your mood and helping you stay grounded. Keep your support network strong. Call or text friends and family. Let kids use social media, Skype or Face Time to stay connected to peers even if they aren't usually allowed to do so. Technology can help younger kids feel closer to relatives or friends they can't see at the moment. Allow video chat with their grandparents every night and ask them to read bedtime stories.

**7. Check in with little kids.** Young children may be oblivious to the facts of the situation, but they may still feel unsettled by the changes in routine, or pick up on the fact that people around them are worried and upset. Check in with them periodically and give them the chance to process any worries they may be having. Children who are throwing tantrums (more than usual), being defiant or acting out may actually be expressing anxiety. Pick a calm, undistracted time and gently ask how they're feeling and make sure to respond to outbursts in a calm, consistent, comforting way.

**8. Accept and Ask for Help.** If your partner is at home, agree to share childcare duties, especially if both of you are working from home and have younger children. That way everyone gets a break and some breathing space. Give kids age appropriate jobs. For example, teens might be able to help mind younger siblings when both parents have to

work. Most children can set the table, help keep communal spaces clean, do dishes or take out the trash. Even toddlers can learn to pick up their own toys. Working as a team will help your whole family stay busy and make sure no one person is overwhelmed. If you have your parents staying with you and they are in good health, you're truly blessed. On the other hand, if you have sick persons to care for, things can be more difficult.

## **SUPPORTING TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS**

Having teenagers confined to home during the corona-virus crisis may not be as labor-intensive as being holed up with small children, but it does present unusual challenges. While younger children may be thrilled at the prospect of having parental attention all the time, adolescents are likely to feel differently.

Here are some tips for parenting teenagers (and young adults suddenly home from college) during lockdown:

**1. Emphasize social distancing** - The first challenge with teens and young adults may be getting them to comply with the guidelines for social distancing. Teenagers tend to feel invincible, and they are likely to be aware that the new corona virus is not as problematic for their age range as it is for older people. Parents are reporting a lot of pushback when teens are told they can't go out and get together with friends. Convince them calmly that they could be asymptomatic carriers and they could kill others, including their grandparents. One thing to emphasize is: *"You just can't be sure your friends are not infected. And while you may be ok with that risk, you'll be bringing the virus home to share with us all."*

**2. Understand their frustration** - For teenagers and young adults, friends are hugely important. If your teen is sulking about being stuck at home with parents and siblings, a direct conversation might be helpful. Tell them you know it's frustrating for them to be cut off from friends. Listen to what they're feeling, validate those feelings and ask them how you can work or play together to make this situation bearable.

**3. Validate their disappointment** - Give them room to share their feelings and listen without judgment (or without reassuring them that everything will be fine). For many the most painful part of the corona-virus crisis will be losing important experiences such as sports seasons, theater productions, and school and college graduations. Some will be worried about college admissions and scholarships. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings and acknowledge the real stress they may be under. Then express confidence in your child's ability to rebound.

**4. Support remote schooling** - Parents are reporting feeling pressured and confused about how to help kids with remote learning. With younger children, it's more a matter of finding fun activities that can be educational. But with older students, keeping up with expectations from school can be challenging, especially for those with ADHD, learning disorders or developmental issues. You can help teenagers create a realistic schedule for getting work done in defined periods, building in breaks and times for socializing,

exercising and entertainment. The key principle: Do a session of work first, then reward yourself with something relaxing.

**5. Encourage healthy habits-** Teenagers and young adults will do better during this stressful time if they get adequate sleep, eat healthy meals and exercise regularly. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, with predictable times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood and fulfill academic expectations. Healthy habits are even more important for young people who may be struggling with anxiety or depression. Losing the routines you've come to rely on can be a big source of stress, so new routines may have to be established. Young adults should avoid sleeping too much. It's important to be physically active. Make sure they are eating properly and sleeping and being social and engaging in pleasant activities.

## ARE YOU AN ANXIOUS PARENT?

Many parents are having a harder time dealing with COVID-19 than their children, and some of the anxiety that kids are experiencing may be inadvertently passed on by worried parents. The treatment for anxiety isn't to make the fear go away, it's to manage the fear and tolerate uncertainty.

Dealing with your own anxiety can be the most powerful way to make sure your kids feel secure. Our daily lives have been disrupted, we aren't sure what tomorrow may bring, and for many of us the nonstop news and social media coverage isn't helping.

We need to learn ways to cope with anxiety in a healthy manner. Visualizing worst case scenarios won't help. If we are showing our kids catastrophic thinking, worry and fear, then they are going to pick up the same behavior patterns and learn that's the way to handle problems.

## KEEPING YOUR COOL

**1. Be smart about what you're reading or watching.** While we should make sure we are informed about how best to keep our families safe, we should also be thoughtful about what we are reading online/watching in the TV to make sure it's actually helpful. Being informed is one thing; being overexposed is another. It is easy to inadvertently get sucked into reading every update as it comes in, or clicking on 'fake news.' Consider setting a time limit for reading or watching corona-related news.

**2. Stay Focused.** Remind yourself that you are doing your part to minimize the risks by practicing social distancing and keeping your hands and your home clean. Focus on your work and family.

**3. Rely on Routines.** Establishing a routine that involves exercise, regular meals and peaceful sleep helps to regulate our moods and our worries. If your old routine is no longer possible because of COVID-19 precautions, look for ways to be flexible and start a new routine. Making agendas and set goals. Remind yourself that life goes on.

## CHECKING IF KIDS ARE ANXIOUS

When kids are feeling anxious, they may exhibit any of the following behaviours:

- Reassurance-seeking (Are we going to be okay? Is grandpa going to be okay?)
- Reluctance to separate from parents
- Physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches
- Moodiness and irritability
- Tantrums or meltdowns
- Trouble sleeping

Kids may not always be able to express how they are feeling. For younger children, using a *feelings chart* instead of saying “Tell me how anxious you are!” may be a good idea. With a feelings chart, which you can find on the internet, you can ask kids to point to the feeling they are having now. Parents can also use a traffic light chart to help kids share how intense their feeling is — a red light means they feel overwhelmed, a yellow light is medium and a green light is okay.

For kids who are more able to articulate how they are feeling, it is better to ask what psychologists call “forced choice questions.” If you ask a vague question you’re going to get a vague answer. So instead of asking “How was your day?” which is pretty vague, you may ask, “Did your anxiety stop you from having a good day today?”

If you’re dealing with a teenager, talk about yourself first. You can say something like, “I saw this article today and it made me wonder about... Did you see something like that? What’s your opinion?”

## **HELPING ANXIOUS KIDS**

- 1. Structure their day.* Children get bored or fretful if they are facing a day without structure - and anxiety can thrive under those circumstances. Make sure you’re structuring their days when they are cooped up at home. Alternate chores or school work with more fun activities and periods of free time. Make sure kids are still getting the chance to exercise and socialize with friends via video chats and social media.
- 2. Avoid giving too much reassurance.* Instead, remind kids of the things they are doing to take care of themselves (like washing their hands and staying indoors).
- 3. Present a calm exterior.* Don’t share your worries with your children, and if you’re feeling anxious, find a way to ground yourself.
- 4. Look for the positive.* Look for the silver linings. Find things you can all do together.

## **WHAT TO DO (AND NOT DO) WHEN CHILDREN ARE ANXIOUS**

When children are chronically anxious, even the most well-meaning parents can fall into a negative cycle, and not wanting the child to suffer, actually exacerbate the youngster’s anxiety. Here are pointers for helping children escape the cycle of anxiety:

- 1. Help Your Child Manage Anxiety.* You may not be able to remove the stressors that trigger anxiety in our child. But you can help them learn to cope with their anxiety and function well, even when they are anxious. Let your child know you appreciate the effort it takes to overcome fear in order to do something he wants or needs to do. Encourage him to engage in life and to let the anxiety take its natural curve. The “habituation curve” will drop over time as he continues to have contact with the stressor. It might not drop to zero, it might not drop as quickly as you would like, but that’s how we get over our fears.



2. *Try to keep the anticipatory period short.* When we're afraid of something, the hardest time is really *before* we do it. So another rule of thumb for parents is to try to eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period. If a child is nervous about going to a doctor's appointment, you don't want to launch into a discussion about it two hours before you go; that's likely to get your child more keyed up. So just try to shorten that period to a minimum.

3. *Don't avoid things just because they make a child anxious.* Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it won't remove the anxiety in long run. If a child in an uncomfortable situation gets upset, starts to cry—not to be manipulative, but just because that's how she feels—and her parents whisk her out of there, or remove the thing she's afraid of, she learns that coping mechanism, and the vicious cycle will repeat itself.

4. *Express positive, but realistic, expectations.* You can't tell a child that his fears are unrealistic—that he won't fail a test, that he'll have fun swimming, or that another child won't laugh at him. But you can express confidence that he's going to be okay, he will be able to manage it, and that, as he faces his fears, his anxiety level will come down. This gives him confidence that your expectations are realistic, and that you're not going to ask him to do something he can't handle.

5. *Respect her feelings, but don't empower them.* It's important to understand that validation doesn't always mean agreement. So if a child is terrified about going to the doctor because she's due for a shot, you shouldn't belittle her fears, but you also shouldn't amplify them. Listen and be empathetic, help her understand what she's afraid of, and encourage her to face her fears. The message you need to convey is, "I know you're scared. I'm going to help you get through this."

6. *Don't ask leading questions.* Encourage your child to talk about his feelings, but try not to ask leading question such as, "Are you anxious about the big test? Are you worried about the science fair?" To avoid feeding the cycle of anxiety, ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling about the science fair?"

7. *Don't reinforce the child's fears.* Don't let your voice or body language convey the message, "Maybe this is something you should be afraid of."

8. *Think things through with the child.* Sometimes it helps to talk through what would happen if a child's fear came true—how would she handle it? A child who's anxious about separating from her parents might worry about what would happen if they didn't come to pick her up. So we talk about that. If mom doesn't come at the end of dance practice, what would you do? "Well I would tell the dance teacher my mom's not here." And what do you think the teacher would do? "Well she would call my mom. Or she would wait with me." A child who's afraid that a stranger might be sent to pick her up can have a code word from her parents that anyone they sent would know. For some kids, having a plan can reduce the uncertainty to a great extent.

10. *Try to set a fine example.* Kids are perceptive, and they're going to take it in if you keep complaining on the phone to a friend that you can't handle the stress or the anxiety.

## **BE AWARE OF YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH**

Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if they are showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one.

Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks:

**Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.

**Elementary school children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.

**Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

## **COPING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS**

A traumatic event is a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that can affect someone emotionally and physically. Experiences like natural disasters (such as earthquakes and floods), acts of violence (such as assault, abuse, terrorist attacks) as well as road accidents can all be causes of trauma.

### **Common Reactions**

The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children. Children who were directly exposed to a disaster can become upset again; behavior related to the event may return if they see or hear reminders of what happened. If children continue to be very upset or if their reactions hurt their schoolwork or relationships then parents should talk to a professional or have their children talk to someone who specializes in children's emotional needs.

Common reactions to emotional distress:

### **For infants to 2 year olds**

Infants may become more cranky. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

### **3 to 6 year olds**

Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviors they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents/caregivers. They may also have tantrums or a hard time sleeping.

### **7 to 10 year olds**

Older children may feel sad, mad, or afraid that the event will happen again. Peers may share false information; however, parents or caregivers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on details of the event and want to talk about it all the time or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

### **Preteens and teenagers**

Some preteens and teenagers respond to trauma by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may cut back on how much time they spend with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents/caregivers or other adults.

### **Special needs children**

Children who need continuous use of a breathing machine or are confined to a wheelchair or bed, may have stronger reactions to a threatened or actual disaster. They might have more intense distress, worry or anger than children without special needs because they have less control over day-to-day well-being than other people. The same is true for children with other physical, emotional, or intellectual limitations. Children with special needs may need extra words of reassurance, more explanations about the event, and more comfort and other positive physical contact such as hugs from loved ones.

## **WARNING SIGNS OF ANXIETY**

Responses to trauma can be immediate or delayed, brief or prolonged. Most people have intense responses immediately following, and often for several weeks or months after a traumatic event. These responses can include:

- Feeling anxious, sad, or angry
- Trouble concentrating and sleeping
- Continually thinking about what happened

For most people, these are normal and expected responses and generally lessen with time. In some cases, these responses continue for a longer period of time and interfere with everyday life. If they are interfering with daily life or are not getting better over time, it is important to seek professional help. Some signs that an individual may need help include:

- Worrying a lot or feeling very anxious, sad, or fearful
- Crying often
- Having trouble thinking clearly
- Having frightening thoughts or flashbacks, reliving the experience
- Feeling angry, resentful, or irritable
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding places or people that bring back disturbing memories and responses
- Becoming isolated from family and friends

Children and teens can have different reactions to trauma than those of adults. Symptoms sometimes seen in very young children (less than six years old) can include:

- Wetting the bed after having learned to use the toilet
- Forgetting how to or being unable to talk
- Acting out the scary event during playtime
- Being unusually clingy with a parent or other adult

Older children and teens are more likely to show symptoms similar to those seen in adults. They may also develop disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive behaviors. Older children and teens may feel guilty for not preventing injury or deaths. They may also have thoughts of revenge.

Physical responses to trauma may also indicate that an individual needs help. Such symptoms may include:

- Headaches
- Stomach pain and digestive issues
- Feeling tired
- Racing heart and sweating
- Being very jumpy and easily startled

Individuals who have a mental health condition or who have had traumatic experiences in the past, who face ongoing stress, or who lack support from friends and family may be more likely to develop severe symptoms. Some people turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope. Although substance use may appear to relieve symptoms temporarily, it can also lead to new problems and impede recovery.