

Parenting Survival Guide 03/16/2020



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PARENTING THROUGH THE NEXT WEEKS

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TIPS FOR THE PARENT

- + **TURN OFF THE NEWS.** Disconnect from social media for as long as you need and as long as you can—and certainly before bed! Unfollow people and mute groups whose posts you find particularly unsettling
- + **PUMP UP THE JAM.** Make play lists of your favorite songs and music that lifts your mood.
- + **ENGAGE IN CALMING ACTIVITIES.** Meditation, yoga, stretching, moving your body
- + **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGY.** Schedule FaceTime parties with family and friends, and with friends of your children. **STAY CONNECTED TO OTHERS THIS WAY**
- + **GET OUTDOORS.** Spring is coming. The weather is getting warmer and the days are getting longer. It's nature's way of reminding us of the cycle of things. Get outside and go for a nature walk. Notice where flowers are poking through the dirt and what kinds of birds you hear chirping. Fresh air is amazingly therapeutic.
- + **SLOW DOWN.** Anxiety has been rampant in our society for far longer than anybody had ever heard of a novel coronavirus. This is a chance to reset and reconnect with our passions and to take a break from the everyday grind that raises our stress level constantly. Forced downtime can be a gift!
- + **SHOW YOURSELF GRACE.** Be kind to yourself. These are unsettled times. It's OK to feel worry. Accept these feelings and take comfort in knowing you're not alone in them.
- + **ENGAGE IN SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES:** Find time for yourself each day—even if this means setting an alarm before the kids get up each morning for a cup of coffee or a workout session in silence. Focus on eating nourishing food and on getting as good sleep as you can.
- + **REACH OUT TO LOVED ONES.** Share your worries and frustrations. Venting is incredibly effective at helping reduce overwhelming feelings.
- + **SEEK PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE/SUPPORT IF YOU NEED IT.** This situation can leave many of us feeling overwhelmed in many areas. If you feel as though you're having a hard time managing your stress level/anxiety/fear on your own, there are mental health professionals available by phone or video conferencing. You can reach out to Sasco River Center for help. (If you have a therapist, please reach out to see if this teletherapy is available at this time.)



A FEW MORE TIPS

- + As a parent, be OLDER, STRONGER and WISER. Model that. Be that.
- + Let go of the worry and be in the moment.
- + Show that you are in and under control.
- + Be a lover not a fighter! Kids will fight you, but don't fight back. Calm them down, show them that you care. You need to calm down so that they can. If you "Model Calm," they will mirror that.
- + Validate their feelings, always. All feelings are okay to have. It is what you do with them that makes the difference.
- + Bend when you can. This is not a time to be super rigid. It is okay to "Throw caution to the wind" and be flexible. They won't adopt "bad" behaviors from these very out of sync times.
- + Don't be defensive. This isn't about you. This is about your child and their fears.
- + Be the person who knows what is going on, who can say, "I got this. I got YOU."
- + Be a responder, not a reactor. When the bee flies around you, don't flail your arms and show fear; remain calm and tell yourself and others around you, "It's just a bee, it will fly away."
- + Be a mirror. Reflect what you are seeing. "I can see that you are really bored, can I help you with that or do you want to work it out on your own?"
- + Provide positive praise, catch them being good so to speak. "Wow, you are so amazing! This is really hard, being away from friends and all of your activities. You amaze me with your great attitude!"
- + Hugs! Snuggles! Holding hands! This is a good time for you to reconnect physically with your kids. While some kids are sensitive to touch, even just a hand on their shoulder or a finger squeeze can go a long way. Touch can provide so much comfort and help ease anxious feelings. Be their shield.
- + Directions should not be questions. "Maybe you should turn the TV off now" should be stated as a direction, "Time to turn it off now." Don't add, "Okay?"
- + Employ the opposite: Say the thing that you WANT them to do, not the thing you don't. "Walking feet" instead of "NO running"
- + Lean in. Be there with them when they are out of control. Avoid banishing them to "get it together". They need you to be there WITH them while they sort it out.
- + Revisit when they are calm what you all can do differently next time.
- + Watch for patterns and be proactive. "I know at 3 pm he is going to get hungry" so have those fun snacks ready to go in advance.

IDEAS FOR THE KIDS

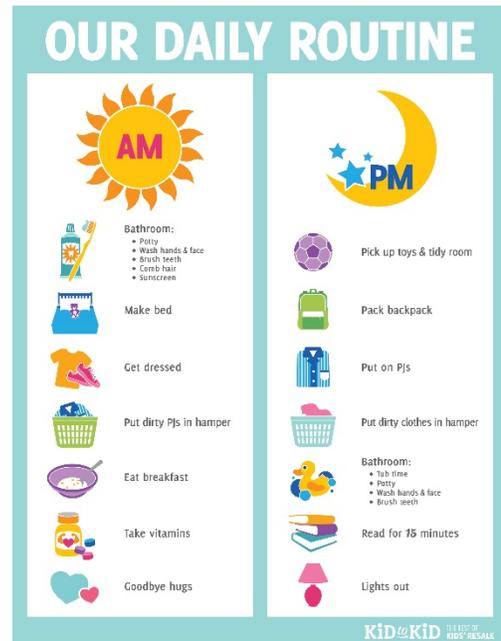
ROUTINES

Kids thrive on routines, especially after a few days of not having any.

Get a large wipe off board and write out each day's schedule. Fill in the times and expectations that are not a choice and leave space for them to add what they do have a choice in. This can also be done on regular paper.

MAINTAIN THE USUAL MEAL AND SLEEP SCHEDULE

Many people feel more secure and in better control when they have a routine for the day. There are many sample schedules floating around on social media at the moment. For some people, these schedules are a godsend; for others (like myself!), they serve to increase anxiety unnecessarily. Go with what works for you, while knowing that what works for you may not work for everybody. This is OK. However, it is important to remember that children benefit from structure and predictability, especially when the typical school routine is upset.



ABC, IT'S EASY AS 1, 2, 3!

One way to create some structure while managing the “how much longer?” anxiety of school closures and self-containment (this can work with children of all ages once they have an awareness of the alphabet or of color names) is to practice “Alphabet Days”. Beginning whatever day makes sense for you, start with the letter A and focus activities around that letter (Art! Acting! FaceTiming a friend whose name starts with A! Eating apples! Watching movies and discovering songs that start with A!) for each day until either you get to Z or (fingers crossed) the containment request is lifted. If self-containing must continue beyond 26 days, next up can be “Color Days”—pick a color of the rainbow and focus on activities/foods/games that are associated with that color. This will take some planning and creativity but, even if not followed exactly, it can help kids understand the length of time of quarantine in a way that makes sense to them.

SCREENS

Dr. Sean O’Leary, M.D., a pediatrician and an executive member of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Committee on Infectious Diseases says. “There’s no handbook for parenting during a pandemic, and we’re all doing our best to adapt to our new circumstances: Our kids may be out of school for weeks, travel is not happening for the foreseeable future and our most intimate interactions will change. One thing that we all accept is going to change: the amount of screen time our kids will get. “I think, for better or worse, what’s going to happen is the limits on device time are going out the window.”



Educational iPad apps

- + Originator Kids:
 - o Endless Alphabet
 - o Endless Reader
 - o Endless Numbers
- + Raz-Kids
- + Kiddopia

TV shows (not for their educational value) include:

- + “Nailed It!”
- + “Powerpuff Girls”
- + “Ask the StoryBots”
- + “Octonauts”
- + “Bluey”
- + Anything PBS Kids offers!

GO OUTSIDE WITH THE KIDS

Try “Cosmic Kids” yoga, Play ball, Blow bubbles, draw in the driveway with chalk, ride bikes, count the animals you see, listen to the sounds you hear, look for budding plants and trees

SCHEDULE FACETIME PARTIES

Reach out to family members and friends and plan to engage in the same project or activity together.

Younger kids can do a craft together, show each other their favorite toys or lovies, and give video tours of their bedrooms.

Older children can watch the same movie together, read book chapters to each other, play “I Spy” games, have scavenger hunts (“Find something in your living room that’s blue”), etc

CREATE HOUSE PROJECTS

Pick a room a day and see what you can all do in it to make it cleaner/neater/more comfortable. This can be an opportunity to clean out old toys, organize closets, remove and donate old clothes, etc.

SEEK OUT RESOURCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A number of educational companies have made much of their material accessible either free or at very low cost. Many parents have taken it upon themselves to crowdsource ideas about how to fill the days. There are some brilliant ideas available. If you’re having a hard time finding things, ask friends. Chances are they’ve come across ideas that they’ll be happy to share.

HELPFUL LINKS:

SOCIAL DISTANCING IS A REAL THING

<https://www.ariadnelabs.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/03/Social-Distancing-This-is-Not-a-Snow-Day-Bitton.pdf>

HOW TO TALK TO THE KIDS ABOUT COVID19

<https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-parents-need-to-know?module=editors-picks&action=click®ion=1>

OT / SENSORY PROCESSING IDEAS

HOME OBSTACLE COURSES

Obstacle courses can be a great way to engage your family physically during this time. Have your children explore the house and find items they can use for an obstacle course. This helps activate their imagination and build their problem solving skills!

Examples to use household items include:

- + Jump over pillows with two feet
- + Animal walk (bear, crab, frog jump) to different locations, or weave in between canned goods/water bottles for an added challenge
- + Use tape or post its to make a “balance beam”



ADAPT BOARD GAMES

Board Games are a great way to engage and entertain your family during this time. If you need additional ideas to “spice up” your games you can add a gross motor “twist.” This can help your child get regulatory physical (proprioceptive) input they may be missing out on as they are engaging at home.

- + For Example if engaging in a card game, every time an “Ace” is played everyone has to do 10 pushups or jumping jacks

KEEP YOUR CHILD ENGAGED WITH THE JUST RIGHT CHALLENGE

- + Children can show the most success when they are in the optimal level of challenge. This means they aren’t too bored or aren’t given so many challenges that they are working too hard. Help your child have a routine that is stimulating to them, while monitoring their threshold for challenges. This is also important to monitor with the conversion to remote learning.

BENEFITS OF KEEPING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Combat symptoms of stress with regulating sensory input. People need a combination of vestibular (head movement) and proprioceptive input (muscle engagement) to be their best selves throughout the day as it releases calming neurochemicals. Add heavy work and muscle stimulation throughout your day with regular intervals of physical activity.

USE THIS AS A TIME FOR REFLECTION

With the amount of time set at home take time to reflect on the goals you have for yourself and your child, and build a plan to help achieve them. If needed you can work with your therapist at Sasco River Center to build a plan during this time.

ADD RESPIRATION GAMES

If you start to observe your children becoming more “amped up” during this time, try to add in respiration games. A few ideas include:

- + Use a straw to make a volcano of soapy water (in the kitchen or bathroom)
- + Put a stuffed animal on their stomach and have the animal rise and fall to promote diaphragmic breathing
- + For older children, guided meditation apps can be a great option

OTHER RESOURCES

Below are some great resources we as parents can turn to both for guidance and support and for activities that can help keep children engaged and active:

- + Child Mind Institute: wonderful mental health resource with great articles on a range of topics related to child development and psychology www.childmind.org
- + Go Noodle: fun videos and songs that encourage kids to get their bodies moving www.gonoodle.com
- + Scholastic is providing educational curricula for home-based learning www.scholastic.com
- + Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube has great videos to get kids moving mindfully
- + This link will take you to a Google doc with dozens more activities to keep children occupied:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o6kEgCKLn3cylm2hehkhSTIk7yRTd0C3zx49JS4wwCl/preview?fbclid=IwAR2z3UkHWHrFDGnkZvJB9URJQ4fNEoykSi2FZsJVzR6cab_iJEyZS8O0DO0

REFERENCES

This document has been compiled from multiple resources, including staff, collaborative colleagues and other professionals.