

Tip Sheet: Parenting During Challenging Times

You Don't Have to Be Perfect

This is a very hard time for families. It's also the perfect time to remember that you don't have to be perfect! You are allowed to feel tired, stressed and worn out.

The two things that need to be on a parent's to-do list right now are:

- 1) *Taking care of themselves.*
- 2) *Connecting with their children.*

We need to **care for ourselves** in order to care for our children, so parents shouldn't feel bad about carving out time each day to do something that makes them feel good, whether it's a workout, a shower or a chapter in a book.

Connecting with our children means finding times across the day to share moments of nurturing and affection. To cuddle, hug and kiss them. To read a story, play a game, watch them play, let them help us cook, go for a walk, or sort laundry. In times of intense change, *children feel safe and secure when they can trust you to be there.*

Dealing with Stress

All parents have moments when they make missteps and wish they had a "do-over." When that happens it's the **repair** that matters most to your relationship with your child. It's what we do after our misstep to reconnect with our child and re-establish our connection. You might say to your child: "I didn't mean to yell when you spilled your juice. I shouldn't have done that, and I'm sorry. Let me give you a big hug! Everyone spills sometimes." It is not about being a perfect parent – it is about *good enough parenting, enough of the time.*

Parents may want to consider strategies they can use on a daily basis to bring down their stress level. This will be different for everyone. Some people like physical exercise, calling friends/family, or doing something creative. You could also try some of these **mindfulness** practices:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2268-mindfulness-for-parents#chapter-1552>

Helping Your Child Deal with the Stress Around Them

Find times to **connect with your children across the day**. Think of ways to get check in, show care and do activities together. Young children regulate their emotions with the help of their loved adults. This is how they learn to regulate on their own. When we make time to "share our calm" with children, they feel safe and secure.

Notice how your child communicates their **feelings** through **behaviour** and be patient with any changes (e.g. losing previously learned skills, being more clingy, or waking more at night). These are often signs that a child is struggling or feeling stressed, so extra patience is required.

Try age-appropriate ways to **help children to communicate their feelings**. For younger children, it can be helpful to turn on some music for a "dance party" that lets children get their "worry wiggles" out or paint a "feelings picture" to show each other how you are feeling. Sometimes young children express their worries and thoughts through play before they can describe them in words - try some simple pretend play with a stuffed animal or puppet.

For older children it is important to be curious about how they are feeling and help them to identify this. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and ask any questions they have. They might also like

to write stories, do drawings or do some mindfulness exercises.

You can also make **calming routines** part of the day. For example, sometimes children might like to sit with their parents and read a book or do yoga / mindfulness exercises together throughout the day or before bed time. Other times children might like to sit on their own and do lego or drawings.

Daily Routine and Schedules

Try to keep daily routines as stable as possible, with wake-up times, meals, and bedtimes as usual. Children thrive on **predictability**, and it's good for their caregivers, too. (It's much easier to deal with a long day with little ones if it's divided into smaller, more manageable pieces.)

A schedule can provide some consistency and helps us to focus on the need for a variety of activities. Identify a few main activities that happen every day (daily routine), then, list categories of activities that your child enjoys, like physical play, reading, drawing/art, quiet play (like puzzles or blocks), free play, play with parents, chores and screen time (if you choose). You can slot in these other activities across the day or ask your child to choose activities from this list, to fill out a daily schedule.

Activities to Do at Home with Children

While it's fun for children to **play with** parents, it's also important for children to have some time to play on their own or with parents nearby, watching, but not involved. Time for independent play builds a child's problem-solving skills, attention, and persistence — and it also gives parents a few much-needed minutes to just *be*.

There are so many fun activities out there for little ones:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-at-home-activity-guide>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Stay Connected with Grandparents, Relatives and Friends

Right now, video chat is a great tool to **stay in touch**. Young children - even babies - can recognise and build a relationship with someone who they interact with regularly on video chat.

Here are some tips for making the most of video chats with your little one, based on the research:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2535-five-tips-to-make-the-most-of-video-chats>

You Have What it Takes!

The most important thing for parents to remember is that you are your child's favourite person in the whole world. **You have what it takes and what they need.**

Some Useful Resources

<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>

<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/covid-19-support-our-tips-for-families-children-and-young-people-and-professionals/>

<https://lifeinmindaustralia.com.au/support-for-those-impacted-by-adverse-events/mental-health-support-for-covid-19>

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>

Reference: <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/first-things/parenting-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>