



Coping With Shelter in Place

Tips for Parents and Kids

These are difficult times for sure. We are all struggling in one way or another with the confusion, isolation, and overwhelm that this pandemic has created. Though children have less global awareness (thank goodness), they are still experiencing their own version of the adjustment stress we all feel. Changes in normal routines and social isolation are especially disruptive to kids' healthy functioning. Here are some tips for helping your family weather the current situation in the best way possible. Focus on a few items that will help add balance and health to you and your family.

Take care of yourself- Our kids are only as good as we are, so practice good self care with breaks for yourself, healthy eating, exercise/outdoor time, and adult social connection through phone, text, and video chat.

Exercise, Exercise, Exercise!- Stay active indoors and out. Get your kids moving too by creating physical challenges and active games.

Eat healthy- Resist the urge to soothe your worries with junk.

Practice mindfulness- Try to stay in the present. Anxiety makes us live in the 'what's coming next,' which keeps us from being present with our kids and paralyzes us with worry about what's to come. There are many good mindfulness apps. like, *Headspace for Kids* and *Insight Timer* which make it engaging and fun to practice.

Embrace acceptance- The situation is what it is. Do what you can for your family and others, but don't add suffering through resistance and wishing that things were different.

Exercise optimism- Even if you don't really believe it—say optimistic things out loud to yourself and kids like “We will all get through this okay.” This models hopefulness for our kids and takes energy away from our “worry brain.”

Talk about feelings- Release your stress and worry with other adults, or journal, or create art to express your emotions. Likewise, help your kids express their feelings. Ask about worry or fear. Check in about the good and hard part of their day each night at dinner. Validate that you understand their feelings. For younger kids, you can have them draw pictures about their day and talk with them about what feelings come up.

Contain feelings- Acknowledging and releasing feelings is good, but they can also take over. If you or your kids are emotionally overwhelmed, practice balancing negative feelings by intentionally refocusing on positive feelings like good memories or humor. Always remember—feelings are temporary.

Balance your thinking- Observe your thoughts. If there's too much negativity and worry, catch yourself and intentionally refocus on something positive. Don't let worry or frustration dominate your mind.

Create routines and structure- We all do better with routine. Create a daily plan for yourself and your kids, which includes work (chores, schoolwork, job work), rest time, outside time, play time, meals, and consistent bed and wakeup times.

Have family fun- Use this time to soak up some good family time together. Do something fun each day. Do things you've thought about but never had time for, like going through old photos, doing a family puzzle, doing family art, or planting some vegetables together.

Limit news media- Stick to the facts from trusted news sources and don't let yourself become addicted to watching all the time. This will create anxiety.

Stay flexible- Realize that there are many right ways things can go.

Get outside- Breathe, walk, connect with nature. Follow social distancing guidelines, but get outside.

Limit screen time- but flex with 'social screen' time. Kids (especially middle school and older) need to stay connected. FaceTime with friends is essential connection time and should not be thought of as the same as video games or watching YouTube.

Teach life skills- Take this time at home together to teach your kids how to do household chores and become more independent.

Help others- Find ways you and your kids can help others in your area. Do good deeds for neighbors.

Talk about what has not changed- So much has changed, but a lot has not. Family, hobbies/interests, nature, and cultural/spiritual beliefs endure and create a sense of stability.

Practice Gratitude- Talk with your kids about what there is to be thankful for. Remember, there is always someone worse off than you.