

# Building Resilience: Parenting During a Pandemic

*Mental Health Tips for Parents and Young Children*

Mental health is always important, but during times of crisis it is paramount. The following guidelines are designed to support you in finding ways to cope, understanding how to practice self-care, and nurturing your connection with your child. *Mental Health Moment* is a joint effort between [Louisiana Children's Museum](#) and [Tulane Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#).

## In This Document:

<b>Keep Calm and Talk Coronavirus</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Struggle is Real</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Positive Parenting during a Pandemic</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Control What You Can</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Roll into a Routine</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Coping with Coronavirus Cabin Fever</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Be Mindful of Media</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Screen Time Tips</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Promote Positive Coping</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Self-Care for Caregivers</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Being Good Enough!</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Parenting Together Under Stress</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Making it Work</b>	<b>16</b>

## Keep Calm and Talk Coronavirus

- Invite your kids to have a conversation with you about Coronavirus. They notice the world has changed and might be more nervous if nobody talks with them about it.
- Children sense when you are worried and scared. Keep calm and speak in a neutral voice when talking about the pandemic.
  - Ask a question like, “What do you know about Coronavirus/ COVID 19?”
  - Listen quietly.
  - Gently correct any misunderstandings they have.
- For very young kids (2-4 years old): Be calm in how you talk and how you act. Answer questions simply. Make them feel safe.
  - Visit [Zero to Three](#) for more examples
- Kids in elementary school: Use clear, simple language and answer only the questions they ask. For information about Coronavirus, check out the following:
  - Pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: [Let's Find Out: Scholastics](#)
  - 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade: [Coronavirus Scholastics](#)
- Visit the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) or the [Child-Mind Institute](#) for more tips on how to talk to your kids about Coronavirus.
- If you work in public places (grocery stores, hospitals, public transit), your kids may be worried about you staying healthy. Tell them what you do to stay safe at work, like washing your hands, wearing a mask, or not getting close to people.
  - [Helper Heroes](#) is a good source for more information
- If kids are scared about illness, reassure them and give hope with these examples:

- Doctors are learning more every day
- Most people who get sick get better
- This will get better
- We are doing everything we can to be safe and healthy
- If kids are worried about you, give them hope by saying things like:
  - I am doing everything I can to keep away germs and stay safe.
- Avoid making promises you may not be able to keep.

## The Struggle is Real

- Young children don't know how to handle their emotions alone.
- Stress can affect their behavior.
- It is normal to see behavior changes when children are struggling emotionally.
- Behavior changes can include:
  - More temper tantrums
  - New fears
  - Being clingier with parents
  - Not doing things they used to do (like going backwards in toilet training)
  - Acting younger than their age
- Respond kindly, calmly, consistently and use positive parenting techniques.
  - Help kids calm down so they can follow rules
  - You might need to give them extra help to follow rules

- Choose your battles wisely
- Be patient if they need help doing things they once did alone or if they act younger than their age
- All children need more love, reassurance, and attention during this time.
- Teenagers may be angrier, less interactive with family members, or have changes in their sleep pattern or appetite.
- Talk to your pediatrician if:
  - A child's behavior places them or others in danger
  - Your child has a long period of appetite loss, a long or big change in sleep patterns, or is no longer doing activities they used to love doing
  - Go to the emergency department if your child has thoughts of hurting self or other people
- Children overhear more than we think they do. Protect them from extra stress by keeping them from overhearing adult discussions about worries and problems.
- Reach out to [this program](#) at Tulane University if you are worried about your young child's mental health.
- Another helpful, free program for parents of kids up to age 2 is called [TBEARS](#). Reach them at (504) 988-9222.

## Positive Parenting during a Pandemic

- Handling challenging behavior with positive parenting will help you manage your child's behavior while maintaining a safe, loving environment.
- For more information about positive parenting, check out [this article](#).

- [This website](#) has information about development and positive parenting ideas for children of different ages.
- Give positive attention for positive behavior:
  - Be specific about what your child did that made you happy
    - For example, “I really like that you shared your sandwich with your brother.” Your praise motivates them to do more of that behavior!
  - Model good behavior for them.
- Think about why your child is misbehaving. Are they hungry or tired? Were their feelings hurt? Were they confused about what you expected?
- The root meaning of discipline is to “guide” or “train.” We have to teach young kids how to behave:
  - Be specific about what you want them to do. Tell and show them so they understand.
  - For example – say, “Put your feet on the ground,” instead of, “Stop standing on the couch.”
- When young toddlers are starting to misbehave, try redirecting and distracting them with another activity. Read more about [discipline with toddlers](#).
- For kids struggling with emotions or challenging behavior:
  - Let them know you understand they are struggling (“I know this is hard”)
  - Make yourself available (“I’m here if you need a hug or to talk”)
  - Set behavior limits if needed (“You can’t hit, but you can take deep breaths or do jumping jacks instead”)
  - Stay nearby while they safely express their feelings
  - Help them move on when they are calmer

- You can use natural consequences:
  - Example -Throwing a toy means they cannot have the toy for the next hour before getting another chance with it
  - Let children know what the consequences are if their behavior continues
- For dangerous behavior, safety is most important.
  - Remove your child from danger or unsafe behavior
  - Tell them in a firm, controlled voice that the behavior is not safe
  - For kids older than 2 years old, you can use a short Time-Out to teach them that behavior is not acceptable (up to 3 minutes is long enough)
    - The [CDC](#) offers tips about how to do Time-Out
- Physical punishment such as spanking or hitting can hurt your child and will not make their behavior better over the long run.
  - Physical punishment:
    - Takes away from your child's sense of safety at home
    - Increases challenging behavior as well as child's worries and fears
  - Lowers brain development and IQ

## Control What You Can

- Kids feel better when they know they can help keep themselves safe

- For kids in school, tell them they help keep themselves safe by washing their hands and not hugging, kissing, or touching other people unless you say it's okay, because this will keep germs from spreading.
  - [Hand Washing Poster](#) to show your kids
- Involve and empower teenagers by letting them help with things that are safe to help with, like preparing meals with you, caring for younger siblings, or delivering supplies to other quarantined family or friends while maintaining social distancing.
- Teens may be upset when they miss major life events (prom, graduation party, sports events)
  - Listen to their frustrations without interruption
  - Tell them they have a right to feel the emotions they are feeling
  - Tell them you wish that things were different too
  - Brainstorm ways they can make up these life events when the situation improves

## Roll into a Routine

- Regular routines help children feel less anxious because they know what to expect.
- You can make a routine that your child can follow even if they stay with relatives while you are at work. Ask them to help the child follow the routine.
- Things you can include in a routine are: waking up, eating breakfast, schoolwork, playtime, nap (if appropriate), lunch, outdoor time, dinner, bath-time, and bedtime.

- Try to keep wake-up time and bedtime close to the same every day. Kids behave better when they sleep well and have a regular bedtime routine. Some bedtime routines can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- Let your child help make the routine if they are old enough.
- Put the schedule in a place everybody can see. Include your work schedule so kids know when you will be away or busy.
- Use tools like [Wide Open School](#) to make a schedule, learn, take virtual field trips, get physically active, embrace their inner artist, and practice emotional well-being.
- Feed your kids three well-balanced meals daily.
  - Many schools in the city are offering free breakfast and lunch. Visit the [NOLA Ready website for](#) information about locations and timing. Information for food pantries and other benefits can also be found on the website.
  - Call 2-1-1 for additional resources for food pantries in the area.

## Coping with Coronavirus Cabin Fever

- Children may become frustrated and “stir crazy” from being home so much.
- Help reduce boredom by planning fun activities to do together as family.
- Quality family time is healthy for kids.
- Give kids a sense of control by involving them in planning family activities.
- Here is a short list of fun activities your family can do together to get you started:
  - Enjoy the great outdoors (click [here](#) for outdoor activities you can do while social distancing)



- Build an indoor fort
- [Free stories to stream on your electronics](#)
- Make playdates via FaceTime or Zoom
- Make cards for loved ones
- Water balloon fights
- Have a family movie night
- Garden together
- Cook or bake together
- Decorate your steps with sidewalk chalk
- Take advantage of free trials, like on [Noggin](#) (but be mindful of expiration dates!)
- Louisiana Children's Museum offers virtual enrichment lessons featuring fun activities you can do with your child
- For more great activity options, also visit the NCTSN website at this [link](#).

## Be Mindful of Media

- Watching too much news increases anxiety in children and adults.
- The news can be scary for young kids and can increase their worries.
- Be aware of where young kids are when discussing news with older siblings or other adults.
- For children (13+), watch the news with them so that you can answer questions
- Use open ended questions to start discussions with them.
  - Visit the [NCTSN](#) website for help in how to format questions.

## Screen Time Tips

- Abandon the guilt! Screen time will likely increase now that children are home all day.
- Try to have a balance between screen time and other things, like playing with toys, getting sleep, getting exercise, and doing school activities.
- Turn on parental controls on devices and programs to keep kids safe from inappropriate content.
- Create a media use plan with your family. Follow this [link](#) for more help on how to make your family's media use plan through the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Social distancing does not mean social isolation! Stay in touch with family and friends through video calls using Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime, etc.
- If you are at work, check in on your child using video or regular telephone calls to make them (and you) less worried.

## Promote Positive Coping

- Check in with your child regularly to see how they are doing emotionally.
- Listening without interruption can be a powerful tool.
- Kids may express their feelings through activities like playing, drawing, or telling stories.
  - Follow their lead on the activity they choose to do with you.
  - You can help put words to their feelings and let them know their feelings are okay. Example: "It's normal to feel sad or scared."
- Encourage older children to ask questions and share their feelings with you.

- Listen to their frustrations and rephrase what they are saying to validate their emotions
- Ask them how you can be helpful in supporting them
- For more information on how to talk to teens, visit this [link](#)
- Remind your children that although we do not have all the answers, you and your family are doing everything they can do to stay safe. The goal is to reassure your child without making promises that you cannot keep.
- If your child has had scary things happen to them before, they may need extra love and attention during this scary time.
- Children need help from caregivers to learn what to do when they have big feelings.
  - At a time when they are calm, talk about things they can do with their difficult feelings, like anger or worry
  - Help them practice using words to share their feelings with you and show them you will listen and try to help them
  - Example: teach your child that a safe way to express anger could be to blow out “dragon fire” breaths when angry to help the angry feelings come out. When they get angry about something later, you can empathize with how they feel and remind them to do dragon breaths to calm down.
- Read [more](#) about helping young children cope with feelings
- Practice coping strategies together as a family
- Deep breathing can be a helpful technique for people of all ages.
  - [Sesame Street](#) has an excellent video about belly breathing for young children
  - A website called [“Stop Breathe Think”](#) provides excellent resources for mindfulness and other relaxation techniques to use when kids feel scared or worried

- Feelings charts can be helpful for young kids.
- Check out these [ideas for families](#) coping with Coronavirus and see ideas for helping children with special needs, like [autism spectrum disorder](#), to handle Coronavirus changes.

## Self-Care for Caregivers

- In order to take care of your kids, take care of yourself.
- Small moments of self-care can be helpful for your heart and mind.
  - Go outside for sunshine, take a bath, laugh at a video on Youtube, talk to a friend, dance to music you love, etc.!
- Deep breathing can be a helpful way of calming your body when stressed.
- This [tutorial](#) can help with focusing your mind and decreasing stress.
- Be gentle when it comes to what you expect from yourself. Be forgiving of mistakes you make along the way.
- Remind yourself that it is okay to be “good enough”. Nobody is perfect.
- At bedtime, replay the good moments that happened that day and savor them in your mind and heart.
- Reach out to community networks for support. A full list of resources can be found on this [website](#)
  - The City of New Orleans has partnered with Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES) to create **#GetYaMindRight** – a virtual support group which will be led by psychiatrist and trauma expert, Dr. Denese Shervington. Participants can learn how to understand and manage thoughts, feelings and fears during this pandemic.

- Mon, Wed, Fri 10:15am
- Visit [MHSDLA.org](https://www.mhstdla.org) for more details.
- RSVP at HealingIs [TheRevolution@iwesnola.org](mailto:TheRevolution@iwesnola.org)
- *Keeping Calm through COVID* Hotline is open 24/7 at 1-866-310-7977 if you are feeling overwhelmed with stress, fear, and anxiety about the uncertainty surrounding Coronavirus
- Center for Hope Children and Family Services- Dr. Patrice Sentino at 504-241-6006 is offering free telehealth counseling services

## Being Good Enough!

- Being a “perfect parent” is an impossible task. Be kind to yourself!
- Do the best you can at the time:
  - Your best varies from moment to moment for many reasons (fatigue, hunger, stress, etc.!).
  - If you lose your temper, you can apologize later and model for your child that we all make mistakes and can say, “I’m sorry.”
  - If you are striving for something as a parent right now, strive to be a “good enough” parent or caregiver; you can’t get it “right” all the time. And you can’t change the reality of the COVID-19 circumstances.
  - When frustrated – stop, breathe, and think! Then you can use more self-control instead of reacting out of anger.
- This quote from Emily W. King, Ph.D., nicely summarizes the current struggle for parents and caregivers:

Public Service Announcement

*Parents: What we are being asked to do is not humanly possible.*

*There is a reason we are either a working parent, a stay-at-home parent, or a part-time working parent.*

*Working, parenting, and teaching are three different jobs that cannot be done at the same time.*

*It's not hard because you are doing it wrong. It's hard because it's too much. Do the best you can.*

*When you have to pick, because at some point you will, choose connection. Pick playing a game over arguing about an academic assignment. Pick teaching your child to do laundry rather than feeling frustrated that they aren't helping. Pick laughing, and snuggling, and reminding them that they are safe.*

*If you are stressed, lower your expectations where you can and virtually reach out for social connection. We are in this together to stay well. That means mentally well, too.*

- Keep in mind that in ten years, your children probably won't remember the academics they were doing during these months. Getting through this time with some grace, laughter, togetherness, and love is what they will remember.

## Parenting Together Under Stress

- Parenting can be done solo, as a couple, or with friends and family.
- Partners and caregivers may start feeling underappreciated or overlooked.
- Acknowledge that we all struggle in unique ways.
- Counterbalance the stress by finding small ways to show appreciation to your partner. This will help you and your partner feel more connected.

- Say a simple “thank you”
  - Share one thing you appreciate about them
  - Leave a small note of admiration in an unexpected place
- When you need to ask for help or support from your partner, do so at a clear time with respectful requests to reduce the chances for misunderstanding. If you are on the other end, listen carefully to what your partner is saying to find ways to be supportive.
  - Adults need the same things children need - recognition, empathy, understanding, love, patience, and respect.
  - Be kind to yourself and to your parenting partners. These are difficult times for all of us.

## Making it Work

- Tackling schoolwork with your child from home? Let’s acknowledge that this is a huge challenge. Award yourself and your kids some “Homeschool Hero” badges because you all deserve it!
- Just a few things to keep in mind as you all adjust to this new reality of doing school from home:
  - Do not expect perfection from your children or yourself!
  - Kids tend to behave differently at home with caregivers and siblings than they would at school with teachers and peers. It’s (probably) harder for you to take the teaching role with them.
  - Create a schedule to help your child know when it’s schoolwork time and when it’s time for other activities. Morning might be a good time for schoolwork, when kids are rested and fresh. But keep in mind that your schoolwork schedule will be different for different families.

- In addition to classwork online or with academic materials, remember to build in time during the day for:
  - “Recess” – outdoor activity and movement
  - Creative play – blocks, dollhouses, art materials, cars and trucks...
  - Sensory play – movement, playdough, play in water, sandbox...
  - Focused fun time with parent/caregiver – they’ll enjoy having your full, positive attention even for short periods of playtime
  - Alone time – children benefit from some solitary play and rest time too. With oversight to ensure safety, children under 2 years may only be able to play on their own for a few minutes; 3-year-olds for up to 10 or 15 minutes; 4-year-olds for about 20 minutes; and 5 years and older for 30 minutes or more.
  - Snack time – keep your child hydrated and re-energized with snacks.
  - Rest time – need we say more? We all need some time to just chill!
  - Chores and other responsibilities (particularly for older children)
  - Include stress-relieving activities – does reading relieve stress for your child? Or maybe it’s climbing the tree in your backyard. Or cuddle-time with you. Make sure they get some of that stress relief time every day.
  - Make sure that there is screen-free time during the day, for the other types of play, interaction, and rest mentioned above.
- Consider space for your child’s schoolwork. Is there a relatively quiet corner or room where you child can work? Can you store school supplies in that area so they can be found easily? Can you add something to make it comfortable (a pillow to sit on when watching online instruction)?
- Every child is different – you will be learning what your child needs from you to maximize their ability to tackle schoolwork:



- How much support does your child need? Does she need your help getting started but then focuses well on her own for up to 30 minutes? Does he do well with reading assignments but get frustrated with math? Do they focus well for half an hour but get distracted and fidgety after that?
  - As you get a sense of when and how your child works best, you can adapt the schedule and when and how you give extra support to help them. Maybe with one child you need to remind them to take breaks before they become cranky. Maybe with another child you need to sit next to them for the first 10 minutes to get them going. Maybe one child needs a short stretch break every 15 minutes.
  - Remember that every child is different, and that age, temperament, interests, and learning styles affect how they approach and accomplish schoolwork. Also realize that kids are different in terms of how well they pay attention, how well they tolerate frustration, how well they work independently, and how persistent they are.
  - Vary the length of learning sessions to suit your child's needs and remember to build in breaks.
- Praise effort much more than the outcome!! Praise will encourage your child to keep working and will help them feel good about their efforts!
    - When you focus on giving praise, it also helps you remember to notice how much they're trying and what they're doing well.
    - Start where they are with your praise; they want to please you! If your child is only able to focus for 5 minutes, start by praising them when they focus and work for small periods of time - "Good job working hard on that problem!"
    - Again, praise effort more than the outcome! "I love how you kept trying even though that sentence was hard," "You did a wonderful job sticking with that whole page of questions," or, "I'm proud of you for paying attention while your teacher was talking."

- Incentives – Having additional motivation when work is tough can be helpful. Maybe your child can earn a star after every assignment they finish, and if they earn five stars they get an extra story at bedtime. Or an incentive can be that when you finish this math page, we'll take our break and walk around the block.
- Pick your battles. Parenting is a marathon, not a sprint! When frustration is building, take a breath and ask yourself how much this battle is worth the cost. If a situation with your child is pushing you over the edge from being firm but kind, it's probably not worth it. Take a break and try again later.
- There will be mistakes. There will be tears. There will also be laughter, pride, and growth. Be gracious, kind, and forgiving with yourself and your kids!
- Find additional resources and ideas about schooling at home:
  - [Tips For Homeschooling During Coronavirus](#)
  - [How to Homeschool During the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak](#)
  - [Top 8 tips for teaching your kids at home\](#)
  - [We're about to turn homes into school. Here's how experts say it's done.](#)
  - [Free Tech for Learning](#)

Find learn-at-home projects from [Scholastic](#), and, as mentioned earlier in this tips sheet, you can check out [WideOpenSchool](#) for additional resources.

*Together, we can make it through this pandemic safely  
and with our sanity intact!*