

Parent Tips

Self-Care While Students are at Home During Covid-19

Self-Care

Parenting is already stressful at times. That's why it's important to remember to take care of yourself, too. When you feel calmer, it's easier to listen and be responsive to your child's needs. Self-care is not selfish or indulgent – it's a way to keep yourself well to ensure you are physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy so you can be there for your child.

The realities of COVID-19 make self-care even more important and necessary. The unknowns of what's coming next can worry even the calmest parent. When faced with periods of uncertainty, other stressors may come up—concern for family members, worries about lost income, keeping the fridge full of groceries, social distancing, keeping the children busy, cleaning countertops, balancing work with child care, sibling rivalry and more. Remember a child needs their parent to offer a calm, stable, and predictable “home base” for them. It's a challenge, but as a parent, the best way to help your child be at their best is to take care of yourself.

Pay Attention to How You Are Feeling and What is Happening in the Moment

Take the time to notice how your body is feeling, reflect, be in the present moment, and calm down before responding to potential stressful situations.

Idea

- Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest.
- Take a deep breath into your belly and feel your hand rise.
- Exhale slowly and gently through your lips, like you are blowing on hot soup.
- Repeat two to four times.

Idea

- First, notice 5 things that you can **see**. Look around you and become aware of your environment. Try to pick out something that you don't usually notice.
- Second, notice 4 things you can **feel**. Bring attention to the things that you're currently feeling, such as the texture of your clothing or the smooth surface of the table you're resting your hands on.
- Third, notice 3 things that you can **hear**. Listen for and notice things in the background that you don't normally notice. It could be the birds chirping outside or an appliance humming in the next room.
- Fourth, notice 2 things you can **smell**. Bring attention to scents that you usually filter out, either pleasant or unpleasant. Catch a whiff of the pine trees outside or food cooking in the kitchen.
- Finally, notice 1 thing you can **taste**. Take a sip of a drink, chew gum, or notice the current taste in your mouth.

Respond to the situation once your heart stops racing and your mind is clear – when you're calm.

Think of Your Child's Behavior as Communication

Your child is most likely experiencing changes in their routines and their way of life now as well. They may verbalize it or may tell you through their behavior – like having a tantrum, withdrawing, ignoring, going back to earlier behavior, not eating, or waking up at night. It's easy to become frustrated since you're already trying to manage so much. You might want to pause and think about what your child might be telling you or what he/she needs.

Idea

Say	Instead of Saying
How can I help you?	Calm Down.
I can see this is hard for you.	Stop Crying.
Are you ok?	You're ok.
Please be gentle.	Don't hit.
Take a deep breath and then tell me what happened.	Stop yelling.
It's ok to be sad/mad/frustrated.	Don't get upset.
Do you need a hug/to hold a stuffed animal/sit near me?	That's enough.
I'm here for you.	I'm over this.

Make Time for Yourself

You and your child are probably used to having time apart – you at work or school, and your child at childcare and school. During this time, many of parents are home due to the coronavirus, and your family may be together 24 hours a day. It may also be that you and/or your partner are essential workers and are still working outside the home.

Idea

- If you co-parent with a partner or parent, you can collaborate on how you can divide caregiving time, so that each of you have time alone. Talk about creating a daily schedule that allows each of you time to focus on work, home responsibilities, and time to yourself while ensuring children are safe and occupied. Set the schedule in terms of who does what and when – it may change daily – it may be a good idea to do it at the end of the day or first thing in the morning, so you can set up for a successful day.

If you don't have another adult in the home, create "quiet time." Designate a time when your child reads in his/her room or plays quietly. Make sure to stay nearby, and take time to take care of yourself. You can also use the time after your child goes to bed or before they wake up in the morning for self-care.

Take Care of Yourself

It's important to find ways to take care of yourself. Think about activities that bring you happiness, reduce your stress level, and create a sense of calm in your body. It's different for everyone. Social distancing may be preventing you from doing your regular self-care activities, like going to the gym, participating in exercise class, or gathering with friends and families. Think about ways of adapting your activities to those that encourage social distancing while keeping you connected to your body and others.

Idea

- Move your body: Exercise outdoors, if it's safe for you, is a great idea like going for a walk/run, hike, and biking on trails. Exercising indoors like doing dance parties with your child, using online videos, and apps that have instructor-led exercise such as yoga, pilates, or group workouts are great resources.
- Stay connected: Technology can help so you don't feel isolated. You can meet online with friends and family through different apps. You can use apps to have virtual parties or do activities together, like participating in social or religious functions.
- Avoid getting restless: Maybe it's time to dust off your mental list of things you want to do, "when you have time." Whatever it is for you, choose items and go down the list. Instructional videos, apps for motivation and support, and experts are easy to find online.
- Take time to relax: Sometimes, we need ways to let go of the pressures of the day. Meditation, mindfulness, and other replenishing activities, like yoga, long baths, or watching funny videos helps.
- Set boundaries: Be able to say yes to activities and situations of your choosing that make you feel self-empowered. Also, feel free to say no to activities and situations that take away your energy and peace or leave you feeling emotionally depleted.

This can be a challenging time because we are in uncharted territory. Preparing for and living with the ever changing impact of the corona virus can create fear and anxiety. Keeping yourself supported and healthy is exactly what is needed to ensure your family stays strong. Following the above suggestions will not only help you feel better, but you'll be better for your family

References:

zerotothree.org/coronavirus

Gibbs, Varelisha *Self-Regulation and Mindfulness*