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COVID-19 Parenting: Breathe. You Got This!

Temper tantrums. Whining. Talking back.

As we grapple with school closures and working from home, many parents are feeling on edge and overwhelmed. Without a doubt, COVID-19 has thrown our way of life into a completely new frontier without a road map.

So, how do we go forward?

First, take three deep breaths and breathe. This is essential to getting ourselves in a place where we can think, respond, and not react negatively to the stress affecting our households. When stress occurs, our sense of safety diminishes and our body will present with a fight, flight, or freeze response. It may look like yelling or screaming, setting unrealistic expectations for our children, or just ignoring the behavior altogether. We all have been there. The good news is we can establish and create a connected and safe place for our family.

Dr. Becky Bailey, author of [Conscious Discipline](#) has five practices of composure she recommends that can bring a sense of peace and connectedness to support the family during these times of uncertainty. **Practice mindfulness.** Being mindful of your emotional response is the first step. When you are in control of your emotions and are able to model calming behavior, you download the calm state to your children. This sets up an environment of safety and the ability to talk through the emotions. Smile, Take a deep breath, And Relax (STAR). Practicing how to be a STAR is essential when emotions are high.

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Create safety and connection.

This is extremely important as our new normal of living unfolds. We all function better when we feel safe and loved. This brings us back to practicing being a STAR, which models calmness for our children. Answering their questions honestly and in age-appropriate terms builds trust and connection. You can reassure them they are safe and that the family will get through this together. Just saying “You’re fine,” is not helpful to build connection and safety.

Establish routine and repeat.

We all do better when we know what to expect and have a sense of belonging. Establishing a daily routine and regular family meetings can help build confidence and connections as they share what they are feeling, ask questions, and help solve the issues that surround social distancing. Don’t forget to include plenty of routine play time.

Encourage helping others.

Create opportunities for children to do things that are helpful to others. Making meaningful contributions enhances a child’s sense of control, boosts the reward centers of the brain, and releases feel-good chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. Helpful contributions may include writing letters or emails to family members, helping you make cookies, etc.

Practice gratitude.

Try to see the best in each situation. Focus on what is going well. “This is exciting, I can’t remember the last time we were able to have dinner together, watch a movie, or play a board game.”

Notice when your children are being helpful and verbalize it. “Wow, I just noticed you gave your sister your teddy bear to help her feel better.”

We gravitate toward what we focus on. Focus on the positive and you will get more of that in your home on a daily basis. Lastly, remember to breathe.

We are all in this together. Practice self-care and seek support from trusted friends and family as we navigate the waters ahead. You are not alone.

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