



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE KIT:

HELPING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH THE GLOBAL
PANDEMIC BECAUSE MENTAL HEALTH DOESN'T STOP



We're here for you.

The challenges of the coronavirus pandemic are vast, and impact all of us on many levels. To support you through these uncharted waters, Child Guidance's clinical experts have put together a mental health resource kit just for you.

We know how stressful and overwhelming this time is and it is our hope that these articles and tips are aimed to make things a bit more manageable.

Visit our website for more resources: www.cgrc.org/blog.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

BE HONEST, FACT-BASED, AND CALM.



WRITTEN BY AIMEE SALAS, CHIEF INNOVATIONS OFFICER

As if parenting isn't difficult enough, add in an international concern like COVID-19 (Coronavirus). You're busy, tired, and concerned yourself. How should you handle this with your child? It is important to get prepared to have the conversation by making sure you have all the facts and a plan of action for your family. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has an excellent fact sheet that allows you to separate fact from rumor.

Your approach matters: Your child sees you as their link to information and safety from the world's most stressful events. Make an effort to remain calm even if you don't feel that way. If you are overly worried, this will prompt your child to become increasingly anxious as well. Be reassuring and share the information that you know in a way that is matter of fact and aligned with what you believe. Make sure that you inform your child that many experts are working hard on the problem and that this will resolve over time.

Meet them where they are. Young children need brief and simple explanations about what is happening, what they can do (with your support) to stay healthy, and reassurances that their home and school environments are being made as healthy as possible. Older children will want to discuss what is happening in more detail and will more than likely refer to what they are hearing through school, friends, and social media. Be factual, accurate, and honest. This helps them feel more in control.

High school age are more able to have an adult-like conversation. Take time to look at factual information together so that they have valid sources to check into when they feel inclined. Discuss the importance of communicating information that they are receiving that conflicts with what you are telling them so that you can work through it together.



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Keep the conversation going: It is critical that in order for you to support your child in being healthy and maintaining a calm demeanor that this conversation is not once and done. Check-in regularly with them to know what they are hearing, listen to their fears, and address any issues that may be arising for them. Monitor what information they are exposed to from the television and social media whenever possible and equip them with tools that help them throughout the day such as hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes. Make sure that you stay up to date with the information your child's school is putting out and comply with request they are making to keep everyone safe.

You may do all of these things and your child may still become anxious and need additional support. The exposure through the news and constant conversation of a pandemic can trigger many feelings and increase anxiety. If your child is having a difficult time talking to you, attending school, completing their usual daily routine, having difficulty eating and sleeping, or experiencing other symptoms of anxiety it is important to reach out to your local community mental health provider for assistance. Your child does not need to feel this way. Help is available to support the emotional wellness that you want for your child and that they deserve.

About the author: Aimee Salas, LPC, Chief Innovations Officer at Child Guidance Resource Centers has extensive experience in community behavioral health and education. She led Child Guidance's school and school-located services as well as other critical community-based programs for over 15 years before becoming Chief Innovations Officer.



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM THROUGH THE COVID-19 "LOCKDOWN"

HOW TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE CHANGES AND
UNCERTAINTIES OF A DISRUPTED SCHEDULE



WRITTEN BY MELISSA BOWEN, DIRECTOR OF ABA SERVICES

Schedules for parents and children have significantly changed. Children are being asked to learn virtually and complete worksheets at the kitchen table, while parents are either working from home or scrambling to find childcare. The stress is real and we are all feeling a bit overwhelmed (our kids included)! It is so easy to revert back to old habits. Read on for ideas on how to help your child with Autism navigate through the changes and uncertainties of the COVID-19 Lockdown.

Keep it structured!

It's easy to let your children engage in lots of preferred activities throughout the day and not stick to their daily routine, but this will likely backfire by the end of the day. Keep a structured routine. Wake up, eat breakfast, and get dressed for the day. Continue to practice good hygiene with your children (take a shower, brush your teeth, and brush your hair everyday)! Use a visual or written schedule and include your child in selecting activities for the day. Spend some time outside, take the dog for a walk, do a sensory activity (we suggest playing with shaving cream on a clean table top or dumping some rice or pasta into a small bin/box and exploring), or make a yummy treat in the kitchen. Intersperse those fun activities with some educational activities that are age-appropriate for your child. Know yours and your child's limits for activities. Set yourself up for success!

Stick to your behavior plans!

If you have or have had behavioral health services in the past, you might have an active behavior plan. Stick to it! Keeping things as consistent as possible is key for helping to ease anxiety and increase expectations during uncharted times. If you're using a sticker chart for expected behaviors or have a set schedule for when your child earns reinforcement, keep using those things. It will help keep things as "normal" as possible for your child, and will also ease your own stress level since you will know how to manage things as they arise.





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Increase reinforcement

So often, we only direct attention to our children when they're doing something they're not supposed to do. Notice your child being "good." Increase the type of reinforcement your child likes during this especially challenging time. Extra hugs and high fives, tickles or singing silly songs, random treats (small pieces of candy or chips), or a simple "I love how nice you're playing with your brother!" can go a long way and help keep children on the "right track" behaviorally. Give specific verbal praise at the same time that you give additional reinforcement. For example, when giving a high five say "I love how quietly you're playing with your blocks!" Give eye contact and be genuine.

Model self-care

Stay calm and model calm behaviors for your child. Knowing that Mom or Dad is anxious or stressed may increase anxiety and stress in your child. Remember to practice your own self-care during this time. Model that for your child. Do yoga together. Take a walk. Cook, read a book, or play a family board game. Exercise, paint your nails, call a friend. Listen to music. Have a dance party. Excuse yourself to your room if you're feeling overwhelmed...and allow your child to do the same.

Use your natural supports

Lean on your natural supports. Your partner, your friends, siblings, or parents. Your neighbors (but don't forget social distancing!) and your support groups. Technology is your friend, use it to connect with your supports even when you can't be in the same room together. Set up a virtual support group using google hangouts, maintain on-going communication in a group chat, make sure you're reaching out whenever you need to, and doing the same for others if you have the ability. We're all in this together.

In the end, don't be too hard on yourself. Stick to the plan and what you know works for your child and your family. Know that this is temporary, yet necessary. Allow yourself to make mistakes and forgive yourself for it. And do the same for your child.

About the author: Melissa Bowen is a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst and the Director of ABA Services at Child Guidance Resource Centers. She specializes in working with pre- and elementary-school-aged children utilizing Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBI) to improve communication and play skills in children with Autism and is passionate about creating systemic change for families and children with unique needs.



SELF CARE

WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS + A RESOURCE TO GET STARTED



WRITTEN BY KAITLYN HUGHES

Self care is extra important in times of stress, disruption, and anxiety. With schools closed and schedules changed, not to mention the plethora of scary news we are seeing every day, it's so important to care for your mental health and make that an active part of your routine.

WHAT IS SELF CARE? Self-care is any activity that helps promote your physical, mental and overall well-being. This can be anything from taking your vitamins to taking a bath. The trick is to train your mind to view these activities as essential, rather than self-indulgent. Taking these few minutes to yourself will help you meet the other needs in your life and improve your overall wellbeing.

I DON'T FEEL LIKE I HAVE ANY TIME, HOW CAN I DO SELF CARE? You don't need full days or even hours to get started in self-care. Taking a few minutes for yourself can help you reenergize and restore balance. Creating a list of things you enjoy doing – moving your body, enjoying a specific home-made treat, reading a blog you love, is a good way to start.

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION. The most important thing to remember with self-care is that you should feel ENTITLED to it. I know the “e-word” gets thrown around a lot these days with negative connotations. But in this case, we're not talking about taking something. We're talking about giving. Give yourself time. Give yourself respect. Give yourself the tools you need to achieve your own goals while caring for your loved ones. Give yourself permission to be more than you are today.

DOWNLOAD OUR SELF-CARE PACKET. It can feel overwhelming to get started. Or perhaps you know someone in your life who could use help prioritizing care for themselves. This Self-Care Packet can be an awesome way to dive in.



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WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS + A RESOURCE TO GET STARTED

While I work with a lot of teenage girls, and created this packet with them in mind, it's really perfect for anyone. It includes different easy self care activities, mindfulness techniques, gratitude journaling, and a 15 minute TedTalk video that I really love (and some others, too). You can [download it here](#).



It's always important to integrate a daily and regular self-care practice, and to take good care of your mental health. It's especially important now. The more you fill your own cup, the more you can handle the unknowns and stressors the world might throw at you. So take 5 minutes, take 10, take 30, and get started! You deserve it!

About the author: Kaitlyn Hughes is a masters level Truancy Clinician at Child Guidance. Originally from Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, she attended Wilkes University for my undergraduate degree and Kutztown University for her masters. She currently resides in Philadelphia, PA. In her free time she enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends. She has a great interest in self care and staying active to promote a healthy balanced lifestyle and loves teaching her clients new techniques and seeing them achieve a more positive mindset.



PROVEN TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING PATIENCE + MANAGING STRESS

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF, MAKE A PLAN, MIX IT UP.



WRITTEN BY TIJU LUTTER, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT + FAMILY THERAPIST

In the best of times, with the best of kids, the best of parents can lose their patience and snap at an undeserving family member. There is a reason sitcoms for decades have used the trope of TV-moms exhaustedly handing boisterous children off to fathers as soon as they arrive home from work. So what happens when parents find themselves at home 24/7 with their kids in the middle of an international pandemic?

In these unusual circumstances, we are all a little overwhelmed. And we are all at least a little stressed. We can expect that our nerves are on edge and patience is short. But before we get to the point of losing our tempers, there are some steps we can take.

First and foremost, be gentle with yourself. Recognize that you are doing the very best you can, and so are the people in your home. When you feel tension rising, remind yourself that this too shall pass, and that all the things you are doing really truly are making the passing come sooner.

Next, consider making a personal safety plan for yourself and maybe every member of your household. This is actually a proven tool that helps reduce violence, trauma, and anger in systems, and every family is a system. It's easy! Think of 3 things you can do, by yourself, within a minute or two, that will help make you feel just a little bit calmer. Then, write them down (I mean it! It really helps to write them out). These can be simple things, like listening to a song, turning on the shower in the bathroom and yelling at the top of your lungs, washing your face, having a cup of tea, rubbing lotion on your hands, or going outside for fresh air. Some people pray or read a favorite poem or verse, stretch or take a quick stroll.

My safety plan says, "look at the sky, roll your shoulders, sing something, anything!" In truth, I use them all depending on where I am and what I need, and they really help! It's especially beneficial for children to make these, too. You can put post-its or tape them to the fridge, and when kids are getting rammy, refer them to their safety plan!



PROVEN TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING PATIENCE + MANAGING STRESS

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Making the plans also gives you a chance to talk to your children about the temporary, but strange, time we are living in, and give them reassurance.

Other techniques for relieving stress are sometimes challenging when you are working from home and have the kids around but all are worth a try! The goal is to quickly release tension, and shift your focus so you can better relax. Here are some proven ones:

- Get dressed in the morning. Wear something you like.
- Take several 4-7-8 breaths: inhale for a count of 4, hold for 7, and exhale for 8.
- Get some good smells into your home. You can burn a candle, diffuse essential oils, or cook cinnamon in a pot of water on the stove.
- 15 minutes of movement of your choice.
- Try five slow wall push-ups to release that stress from your shoulders. Deep muscle compression is good for everyone!

Another technique that can help you stay relaxed when the day seems eternal is to punctuate your day with some surprise activities. All you need is the timer on your phone (or anywhere else). Try these:

- Suddenly play the Quiet Game, set your timer for 60 seconds and then nobody talks until the timer rings, ready-set-go!
- Set an alarm and announce, “Outside for 5!” Make everyone hurry outside, and then you can let the 5 turn into 10 if things are going well. (Just no communal playground time).
- Set an alarm and announce it’s time to drop everything and clean! This should be for no more than 5 minutes, and everyone runs around and picks up as fast as they can.
- If you are struggling getting your kids off screens, you can also do a drop everything and read for 10-20 minutes.

Finally, take a note from Elsa, and Let It Go. It’s ok if things are a little loose right now, and the toys are all over or the kids are still in their pajamas at lunch. Some days are just going to be like that. You are a good parent, you have good children, and you are a pioneer. You are successfully navigating a new, but temporary, world. Give yourself credit – you deserve it.

About the author: Tiiu Lutter is the Director of Development at Child Guidance and a Family Therapist who specializes in intra-family relationships, couples and adolescent concerns. With a degree from Immaculata University, Tiiu has her degree in counseling and school guidance. She has been an IEP consultant and educational advocate and is certified in secondary guidance. She has experience working with trauma, loss, and multi-generational family issues. She believes that every child, regardless of age, seeks to connect to their parents (and vice versa), and that with support, couples can find their way through almost every challenge, and thrive as a result.



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