



HELP YOUR CHILD COPE DURING THE PANDEMIC WITH THE COVID TOOLBOX

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By: Dr. Dina Kulik

The pandemic has proven to be stressful and anxiety-provoking for adults as well as children. The new norm of masking and keeping a distance from friends and other loved ones can be challenging for young people to understand, but it is essential to keep them healthy.

Here are my favorite strategies for:

1. PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING

3. HAND HYGIENE

4. VIRTUAL LEARNING



1. PARENTING IN THE PANDEMIC

Here are some strategies to help your child cope with restrictions posed by the virus.

1. Encourage your child to ask questions instead of you always directing the questioning.
2. Listen more than speaking.
3. Reassure your child that they are safe.
4. Understand what they are going through. Your child may have difficulty sleeping or eating or may be moodier. Your child may need extra TLC from you.
5. Kids look to parents to feel safe and secure. Let your child know you are a team and will work together to get through this time.
6. Stick to a routine. Kids and adults like routine and predictability. As much as possible, stick to your typical sleep and mealtime routine. Even if your children learn from home, wake at your usual times, perform everyday hygiene habits, and eat as usual. Avoid snacking all day and focus on three healthy meals per day.
7. Encourage your child to remain social, even from a distance. Have virtual playdates or distanced ones with a mask. Your child will feel less isolated and lonely if they can 'see' their friends.

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2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Social (or physical distancing) can feel difficult for children who are used to being near friends and family. It can prove very challenging to maintain distance.

It is important to emphasize that physical distance is not emotional distance, and children should be encouraged to connect with their loved ones. It is also a great time to connect to those in your household and form even stronger bonds than before.

Here are some tips to decrease feelings of isolation or sadness while we maintain distance:

1. Use technology to connect with friends and family. Set a date for a playdate, so your child has an opportunity to get excited about it.
2. Try a new hobby. Even better – start a new hobby with your child. I started playing guitar with my eldest over the pandemic, and it is so much fun!
3. Learn a new skill such as baking, computer programming, or cooking. Activities that can be done as a family or in friendly competition are fun as well.
4. Spend quality time together, making new memories. Play a board game, watch a movie or do a puzzle together.
5. Spend time outside as a family. The fresh air and physical activity will do wonders for your body and mind. Getting your heart rate up will help you all feel healthier and more energetic.
6. Start a book together. We are reading (and in some cases) re-reading Harry Potter as a family each day. The younger kids love reading with their older brothers and me. It is a lovely bonding time.
7. Start having your children help with chores. My kids now help wash and put away dishes, food preparation, make their beds, and tidy their rooms each day. Everyone in the family needs to pitch in to keep the home clean and organized. My kids love knowing they are contributing positively to the order of the house.

3. GOOD HAND HYGIENE

How do I encourage my children to practice good hand hygiene?

We know that practicing diligent hand hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent illness. Young children and babies often put their hands in their mouths, so keeping them clean can go a long way to avoid viruses and bacterial infections.

Here are some tips to ensure your child's hands are clean:

1. Ensure your child washes their hands for at least 20 seconds. Singing 'Happy Birthday' twice does the trick.
2. Encourage your child to wash their hands at particular times, as a habit.
 - a. After using the washroom.
 - b. Before and after eating.
 - c. Before and after preparing meals.
 - d. After sneezing or coughing into their hands/tissue.
 - e. After touching another child.
 - f. After touching another child's toys.
 - g. When the hands look visibly soiled.
 - h. After touching animals.

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Hand Hygiene continued;

When should I use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

If you do not have access to running water and soap, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to decrease the spread of germs.

Kids should use a dime-size amount in their palm and then rub their hands together. Encourage your child to rub the back of the hands and around each finger and thumb.

Do not forget to have sanitizer touch the fingertips. Allow the sanitizer to dry. I tell children to imagine that the sanitizer is paint. You want to ensure the 'paint' covers every surface of the skin. You can even practice with some finger paint. It can be challenging to cover all the surfaces, and the visualization can be helpful.

How do I teach my child to wash their hands properly?

Follow these simple steps:

1. Make the hands wet with running water.
2. Apply soap to the hands.
3. Lather and rub all surfaces of the hands well for at least 15 seconds. Singing 'Happy Birthday' twice does the trick.
4. Rinse the hands well with running water.
5. Pat the hands dry with a clean and dry towel. Alternatively, you can air dry.
6. Turn off the tap with the towel or your sleeve without touching it with your bare hands.

What should I remind my kids to keep safe?

1. Tell your children to cover coughs and sneezes with their upper arm or a tissue, and not use the hand. Discard the tissue right away and wash or sanitize the hands before doing anything else.
2. Avoid touching your face, particularly the eyes, nose, and mouth. Imagine there are sparkles all over your hands, and these can quickly transfer to other surfaces. This is like germs!
3. Your children should stay home when sick, and model this behavior for your kids as well.

4. VIRTUAL LEARNING

Learning from home is a unique complication of the pandemic. Most parents are not formally trained educators, and there are certainly challenges associated with learning from home. As parents, it is beneficial to instill some normalcy and stability during this time. Routine helps children feel safe and secure.

Here are some tips to ensure virtual learning success:

1. Connect with your child's teacher or school and stay in touch throughout this home learning period.
2. Review what is required of your child and what equipment they may need.

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Virtual Learning continued;

3. Ensure your child knows how to turn on their device and connect to the virtual learning platform.
4. Review assignments with your child and plan with your child about when they will complete the work.
5. Create a daily schedule, so your child and you know what to expect. Children love routine and predictability.
6. Connect with the teacher should you face any challenges. Your child may have some connectivity issues or difficulty with some work. Letting the teacher know can prevent further delays and stress.
7. Keep the usual routines for sleep and mealtimes. Avoid snacking all day, and instead focus on three healthy meals a day, as was the case during in-person school.



8. Structure the day for school time, snack and meal times, rest time, and physical activity. Getting outside each day for some exercise will make your child feel less isolated and more energetic.
9. Be flexible and adapt the schedule based on your child's needs.
10. Remind your child of your expectations and ask them what they love and what they are not enjoying. Remain flexible about the schedule to ensure school work is complete, but your child remains happy and confident.
11. Encourage your child to remain connected with their friends and loved ones, even when not in school. Organizing virtual playdates or distanced meetups (while masked and maintaining 6 feet of distance) can help your child feel more connected and less isolated.
12. Try to make learning fun by incorporating puzzles, drawings, painting, and building exercises. Kids love to learn by touching and creating.
13. Encourage your child to journal or draw their experiences so you can both reflect on their feelings.

#YouGotThis



Dr. Dina Kulik, MD, FRCPC, PEM

Dr. Dina is a pediatrician and emergency medicine doctor. She is the founder and director of Kidcrew, Toronto, Canada.

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By: Rosalee Lahaie Hera

1. GET OUTSIDE

Get out in nature as often as you can. Children benefit significantly from as much time outdoors as possible - and caregivers and parents do too. Everyone gets fresh air, exposure to natural light, exercise, and delicious sleep at night as a result! Aim for at least an hour a day, more if possible.



2. STICK TO ROUTINE

Stick to your nap and bedtime routines, even through these challenging times. Children crave consistent routines and are more flexible and resilient when they're getting the rest they need.

You will be, too! The more stable you can make their home environment, when everything else around them may be changing and scary, the more relaxed and reassured they feel.

3. BE REALISTIC

Acknowledge that it is difficult - often seemingly impossible - to care for children during this time. Get creative with ways to take a break. You'll be a better parent for it, and your kids will learn how important it is to care for themselves, too.

Switch with your partner to give each other an hour of alone time each evening before your child's bedtime. Enlist grandparents or other family members to 'watch' the kids virtually for 30 minutes here and there (reading books over video chat is a big hit in our home!). Arrange for a solo walk outside each day - even 15 minutes can be a game-changer.



**Rosalee Lahaie Hera, BArtSc, MBA, PhD(abd)
Certified Sleep Consultant**

Dr. Rosalee Lahaie Hera is a Certified Pediatric & Newborn Sleep Consultant, a Certified Potty Training Consultant, the founder of Baby Sleep Love and the co-founder of The Parent Playbook. She's also a Mom to two beautiful little humans.

Rosalee's [Website](#)



By: Alley Dezenhouse Kelner

1. NOTICE YOUR TRIGGERS

If you're feeling short-tempered or easily triggered by your kids' behavior, know that increased stress often makes us more reactive.

Try to spot your triggers, notice patterns, and modify the environment to meet your needs proactively. Turning down the noise (literally and figuratively) can go a long way in staying regulated.

2. ROLE REVERSAL

If you have a preschooler and their routine is upside down, and they are more combative than usual, try filling their "control bucket" will role reversal. For example, let them be the teacher while you are the student, let them be the parent while you are the baby, or let them be the coach while you're the player.



3. ARE YOU 'TOUCHED OUT'?

If you are a parent whose feeling "touched out" at the end of the day, know that it's ok (and actually quite positive) to compassionately and consistently articulate those boundaries to your child.

Teaching kids that compassionate boundaries are healthy is as essential for them as it is for you. We want our kids to know that their boundaries are respected (and ours are to be respected)— especially those about personal space and bodily autonomy.



**Alley Dezenhouse Kelner, MA Counselling Psychology
Clinical Director, Therapist**

Alley is the Clinical Director of Magnificent Minds Inc., where she supervises special education and therapy programs for children with complex needs ranging from Autism, to ADHD and dual diagnoses. She uses best practices in mental health and behaviour science to empower kids and their parents.

Alley's [Website](#)



By: Taya Griffin

1. ACCESS VIRTUAL

Don't assume that you need to access nursing support only in person. Virtual lactation support can be highly effective!



2. GET ONLINE

Join online baby groups, mom support groups, and baby classes. They may not be the same as in-person but may just provide the oxytocin rush and encouragement that you need!



3. BE HONEST

Be open with your support team about how you are feeling mentally. They can help you access any assistance you need.



Taya Griffin, IBCLC
International Board Certified Lactation Consultant

Taya is a breastfeeding mother with over 1,200 hours of clinical experience helping mothers achieve their breastfeeding goals. She helps moms in clinic, at home and in the hospital once they have had their babies and am also passionate about helping mothers prepare for their breastfeeding experience.

Taya's [Website](#)



By: Alejandra Penalosa

1. INVOLVE YOUR KIDS

Try to involve your toddlers in house chores; you'll get things done, and it is entertaining for them, plus you'll be working on their development without even knowing it. Ideas include putting clothes in the laundry, finding matching socks, helping clean the windows, set the table, clean dishes, and enlisting their help with cooking.



2. PREDICTABILITY AND CONSISTENCY ARE CRITICAL

Letting your child know what will happen or what is expected from them will help prevent a meltdown. For example, having a visual routine and visual rules (words or images depending on their age) will help them know what they are supposed to be doing.

3. TIMERS

Ask your child to help you set a timer when something fun ends; it will help transitions. A timer can be used to signal the time to turn off the tv, leave the park or put away toys.

4. LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF HOW THINGS “SHOULD BE”

Take one day at a time, be kind and compassionate with yourself. You are doing your best, parenting is hard, and parenting during a pandemic is even more challenging. Do what you have to do to have a few minutes of 'you time,' to have a coffee, shower, and recharge your bucket.



Alejandra Penalosa, BA CYW MFT
Parenting Consultant

Alejandra is a parenting consultant and family therapist, founder of HeartSmart Parenting. She'll help you enjoy the gift of parenting by providing you with a set of tools to help you navigate the challenges and have fun throughout the journey. She's a mom to a toddler and a stepmom to a teenager.

Alejandra's [Website](#)



By: Allison Madigan

1. MOVEMENT EVERYDAY

Exercise is excellent for endorphins and reducing the effects of stress. I always feel better after and notice reducing my stress & anxiety when I do it daily.



2. NOURISH MY FAMILY WELL

Ensure that we are optimizing our nutrition and eating lots of veggies, protein, whole grains, and healthy fats. It keeps our blood sugar balanced and keeps our energy, moods, and immune systems strong.

3. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Some days feel heavier than others but finding things to be grateful for every day helps keep a positive mindset. If journaling isn't your thing, simply think of 3 things you are thankful for before you get out of bed each morning.



Allison Madigan, DHN
Holistic Nutritionist

Allison Madigan is a Holistic Nutritionist, founder of The Vitality Formula, a facilitator of The Wild Collective and mother. She helps overwhelmed women prioritize themselves and regain their energy and vitality. Her purpose is to empower them to lead a holistic, healthy and mindful life.

Allison's [Website](#)



By: Alyson Martinez

1. KEEP A REGULAR SCHOOL MEAL AND SNACK SCHEDULE

We have seen that kids eating habits can change so quickly during virtual schooling- for example, skipping breakfasts, snacks replacing lunches and lots of stress eating.

These changes in practices can be detrimental to your child's functioning, mood, or best health. Trying to stick to their standard meal and snack schedule can help keep a sense of normalcy and improve their health.

2. FIND OTHER OUTLETS FOR STRESS RATHER THAN EATING

No matter what your age, extra snacking during stress is a standard method to cope with stress. This habit isn't great for your child's health, both right now and for their future.

Dealing with stress through snacking is a habit that can be hard to break with time, so this is the time to help teach your child other stress management strategies.

3. HACK YOUR WAY TO A HEALTHIER DINNER TIME

Working from home and virtual school can take up so much time and energy that it can feel impossible to get a meal on the table. If this leads your family to choose fast food more often, try to think about more manageable ways to get dinner cooked.

Meal prep boxes can be a fantastic choice, as well as "dump and go" recipes for your slow cooker or pressure cooker. Choose pre-cut vegetables to save time.

When you choose fast food, try to choose baked or grilled options rather than deep-fried ones, and supplement your meal with a salad kit that you can get from the grocery store.



Alyson Martinez, RD
Registered Dietitian

Alyson is a Registered Dietitian with over a decade of experience, working with infants and children to overcome all types of nutrition issues. She has gained her skills working in the paediatric department of an academic acute care hospital, and also maintains a private nutrition counselling practice.

Alyson's [Website](#)