TIPS FOR FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

SELF CARE

- Safety is always first. Make sure that you follow the recommendations of the CDC: Center for Disease Control and the WHO: World Health Organization in how to reduce the risk of being infected with COVID-19 and what to do if you do become infected.
  
  - Here is a helpful video (including questions and answers) from the CDC on how best to wash your hands.

- Events such as this virus outbreak are confusing and scary for children, especially when they don’t understand what is happening. Take time to inform your child what’s happening in ways she can comprehend. Make sure to stick to the facts and to stay away from blaming certain people or groups.
  
  - To explain Covid-19 to a child, here is a comic to help “Just for Kids”
  - Here is another helpful tip sheet for “Talking to Children About COVID-19”

- It’s always important to practice good self-care, but it is especially important during times of stress such as these. Common helpful ways to take care of yourself include:

  - Maintaining a regular sleep schedule (and getting enough sleep),
  - Eating healthy
  - Exercising
  - practicing coping strategies

  Take some time and check in with yourself on each of these

- It’s very important for you, as the adult, to take care of yourself as; 1) it’s tough to care for a child when you’re not taking care of yourself, 2) your child will respond to your stress with his own stress, and 3) your child is watching you to learn how he should manage his stress. Take this as an opportunity to model healthy self-care and give your child the opportunity to practice.
**SCHEDULE & ROUTINES**

- Children thrive on structure. Especially during such unpredictable times, it can be very helpful for children to know what is coming next. This helps to reduce their anxiety. Even if you have to change it as you go along, try to create a schedule to your days so that your child (and you) know when you’ll be doing things such as eating breakfast, doing chores, completing schoolwork, playing together, relaxing on your own, socializing online, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 9:00</td>
<td>Wake Up: Eat breakfast, make bed, get dressed, PJ's in laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Morning Walk: Family walk with dog, Yoga if raining</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30-11:00</td>
<td>Academic Time: Electronic Free – except zoom morning meeting with class. Flash cards, journal, work packet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>Creative Time: Legos, drawing, music, cook, crafts</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch: (wash hands before and after lunch)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00</td>
<td>Chore Time: Wipe down table, Wipe door handles</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td>Quiet Time: Reading, puzzle, word search, crossword, nap</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00-4:00</td>
<td>Academic Time: Academic Electronics OK - Prodigy, educational TV show, online work from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-5:30</td>
<td>PM Fresh Air: Bike, walk dog, play in yard (Keep social distance)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30-6:00</td>
<td>Wash up / Relax: Wash hands &amp; face and be ready for dinner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Dinner: Make healthy choices</td>
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**Allowing for Down Time**

- There can be a lot of pressure to try to be as productive as possible while we’re all most of us are trying to maintain social distance and staying at home. Though creating routines and schedules can be helpful to keep things feeling normal (for both children and adults), it’s also possible to over-schedule ourselves. Make sure to build in time for stress relief, time together, and time apart.

**RULE/EVENTION SETTING**

- Most families have expectations, whether they are written down or not. It’s helpful for youth to have clear expectations, especially during difficult times. Knowing what is expected can help with increasing consistency and make it easier for children to follow the rules. If you have already made your rules and expectations clear to your children, it is always good to set up regular time for reminders. If you haven’t made your rules and expectations clear to your children, find a good, calm moment to sit down with them and have a family conversation. Discuss what expectations are important to your family. To increase their buy-in, let them create and write down the expectations with you. The discussion could sound something like this:
  - “What do we value as a family? What’s really important to us?” (It may be helpful to use the “Smith Family” example below to give them a sense of what you’re asking)
  - “How do we show those values?
    - at home?
    - at school?
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- at work?
- with friends?
  - “What expectations or rules do we have as a family?”
  - “How do those expectations fit with our values?”
  - “What nice things can and should happen when we follow our expectations?”
  - “How should we handle it when we don’t follow our expectations?”
  - As the adult, you may need to provide some ideas here and there (especially those expectations and values that you find important) but try to let your child come up with as much of the content as possible. Once everyone agrees, have everyone sign the document and post it somewhere everyone can see and read it.
  - You might create specific rules for events or locations. (i.e. when we are in the car, shopping, or at a friend’s house). Given how much time many of us are spending online, it may be helpful to review or set expectations around internet use and social media. Here is a helpful resource regarding teaching your children to “STOP BLOCK and TALK”

Practice

- So maybe you have already established clear rules in your home, or maybe you just attempted the activity above. Now it’s time to practice. As the saying goes, “practice makes perfect” and it’s the practice that helps children to know what you expect of them. It may be clear to a child that she shouldn’t run around the pool, but does skipping count? What about running backwards? Practicing what she should do, including what it doesn’t look like, can help clarify for children what’s allowed and what’s not allowed.

Encouraging “Good” Behavior

- Praise: We all like to know when we’re doing the right thing. When your child does something that you want him to do, let him know, so he knows that he should do it again. Try to be specific with your praise so that he knows what he did right. A quick “good job” can be nice, but it doesn’t tell your child what he did well. A “nice job cleaning the dishes, they sparkle!” tells him what he did well and encourages him to do it again.

- Choice: Especially in uncertain times, we like to feel that we have control over our lives. One way that we can provide that control for children is through reasonable choices. If it’s time to do schoolwork, and she gives a strong “NO!”, maybe let her choose what work she’s going to do

Smith Family Expectations

- We are Safe
  - We don’t let anyone into the house we don’t know
  - We ask an adult before leaving the house (letting them know where we will be, who we’re with, what we’ll be doing)
  - We share our screens with Mom and Dad when they ask (including TV, Computer, etc.)

- We are Responsible
  - We pick up after ourselves
  - We get our work done, then have fun
  - We chip in and help with chores (especially without being asked!)

- We are Respectful
  - We speak kindly to each other
  - We honor each other’s privacy (unless there’s a safety issue)
  - We ask permission before using someone else’s stuff
now versus later (Note: She still needs to get it done, it’s just a matter of when). This way she gets to feel a bit of control over her world.

**Discipline**

- As much as we try to prepare children by 1) talking about our values and our rules, 2) practicing what is expected of them, and 3) recognizing them when they do the things we want of them, they’re going to make mistakes and/or they’re going to test the limits of those rules (especially teenagers). So, we might as well be prepared for when those mistakes happen. Take that list of rules and expectations that you created above and identify *(ahead of time)* consequences for when they aren’t followed (i.e. Chores not done = No TV time).

- You and your coparent can even create this list of consequences with your child so there are no surprises. Make sure that your consequences are *reasonable* and *feasible*. There’s no sense in threatening to throw away all her toys or the family TV. If you can’t follow through, they’re just empty threats. Children quickly learn what they can get away with when we can’t follow through. Remember, we all learn what we should do by being clear what the expectations are, having opportunities to practice these behaviors, and getting feedback. So, when behavioral errors occur, it’s ok. Just remember to think of how we can give a chance for our kids to practice what we would want them to do in that situation next time.

**WHEN TENSIONS RISE**

- With so much unknown, it’s easy for any of us to get stressed. Remember the “self-care” section above? Make sure to take care of yourself so that you can think clearly when in front of your child or children. This may mean walking away and taking a deep breath when you’re tempted to yell or provide a strong consequence. It could also mean “trading out” with another adult, letting that person respond to misbehavior. Though it’s often best to respond to a misbehavior quickly, it’s better to make sure that the decision around the consequence is made when you are in a space to be rational.

- As your child gets more upset, his ability to think clearly and rationally decreases. This is a good time to provide options in a calm, clear manner *(e.g. “Right now your options are to do your homework or to clean the dishes” or “I see you’re upset. You can take a break in your room for 5 minutes or we can practice some good deep breaths together”)*. This will let your child know what he can and should do.

**Be Kind to Yourself**

- Remember, when your child was born, she did not come with a book of instructions. She *certainly* did not come with a chapter addressing what to do during a pandemic. Remember to be kind to yourself through this. The most important thing is to stay safe and follow the recommendations of the CDC and the WHO. If you can chip away at some of the things mentioned in this handout, you will just make this experience a bit easier for yourself and your child.

- Don’t be afraid to reach out to family members, friends, or community supports (like “Call2Talk”) if life feels overwhelming. *You’re not alone.*
References and Resources

Self-Care Resources

- **Centers for Disease Control: Coronavirus (Covid-19)**
  - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- **Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks** (click on the download on the right-hand side of the page)
- **Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19**
  - [https://www.nasponline.org](https://www.nasponline.org)
- **How to talk to children about the coronavirus**
  - [https://www.health.harvard.edu](https://www.health.harvard.edu)
- **Mindfulness and Well Being: Students**
  - [https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing](https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing)
- **Public Health Emergency: Psychological Tips for Children and Adolescents’ Emotions**
  - [https://www.hemot.eu](https://www.hemot.eu)
- **Social Emotional Learning Supports Around COVID-19**
  - [https://sel4us.org/blog/social-emotional-learning-supports-around-covid-19/](https://sel4us.org/blog/social-emotional-learning-supports-around-covid-19/)
- **Talking to Your Children about COVID-19**
- **What you Need to Know about Handwashing**
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo&feature=youtu.be)
- **World Health Organization: Coronavirus**
  - [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

Rule/Expectation Setting Resources:

- **A Video Overview of Positive Behavior Support: at Home** (Scroll down to “An Overview of Positive Behavior Support” and view the “at Home” video)
  - [https://www.apbs.org/](https://www.apbs.org/)
- **Mental Health and Well Being: Families**
  - [https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing](https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing)
- **Online Safety during COVID-19**
  - [https://www.suffolkcac.org](https://www.suffolkcac.org)
- **Setting up for Success at Home: Using Ci3T Structures to Facilitate Positive, Productive, Continuous Learning Opportunities during the COVID-19 Crisis**
  - [http://www.ci3t.org](http://www.ci3t.org)
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Discipline

- **Beyond Discipline for Teens**
  o https://www.ahaparenting.com/Ages-stages/early-teens/positive-discipline-teens

- **Positive Discipline – for Parents of Elementary School Kids**
  o http://www.kidpointz.com/parenting-articles/elementary-school/positive-discipline/

Additional Helpful Family Resources

- **44 Fun Indoor Activities for Kids and Families Stuck at Home**
  o https://fabulesslyfrugal.com/fun-indoor-activities-for-kids-stuck-at-home/

- **Call2Talk**
  o https://mass211.org/call2talk/

- **Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities**
  o http://flfcic.fmhi.usf.edu/program-areas/emergency.html

- **Responding to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak through PBIS**
  o https://www.pbis.org

- **Supporting Families with PBIS at Home** – PBIS Technical Assistance Center
  o https://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-families-with-pbis-at-home