

Suggestions for Coping with COVID-19: For your children, your family, and YOU!

Very little is normal today and it can be very hard, even for the youngest among us. Perhaps the hardest thing for your children is the departure from the regular routine of going to school and being with their friends and teachers. Even harder still may be the pressure on you to provide for your family's safety and well-being – oh, and keeping the kids happy and learning. Some children will respond to these times with increased behavioral challenges, sleep problems, toileting regression, and heightened general agitation. Sound familiar? Here are TEN TIPS to help you get through this.

1. **TAKE CARE OF YOU!** – Your children need you – not only in the home, but also your strength and reassurance. This means you need to stay healthy both physically and emotionally. Do the things that promote physical and emotional wellbeing (e.g., avoid the virus, exercise, get adequate sleep, avoid excessive screen time, and focus on the positive things you can control). If you are struggling to cope with all this, contact *The Children's League* 716/592-9331 or the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disaster Distress Hotline* at 800/985-5990.
2. **MAINTAIN REGULAR ROUTINES** – Although going to school is no longer an option, it is important for your children to have some predictable NEW ROUTINES. Keep bedtime routines the same everyday, build some structured learning time into their day, and perhaps most importantly, actively play with your child everyday – at regularly scheduled times. Consider talking with your child's Teacher and/or Speech Therapist – they may be able to help you build a daily visual schedule.
3. **PROVIDE REASSURANCE** – Your children may need to be reassured – although they may not comprehend the full scope of what is going on, they do know that something is different. They may also absorb your stress – so try to keep your cool in their presence, listen to them, speak kindly, and assure them that you are doing all that you can do to keep them safe.
4. **PAY LOTS OF ATTENTION TO THE BEHAVIORS THAT YOU LIKE** – Often children use the most efficient strategies to get your attention, regardless of whether it's positive praise or getting yelled at. If they are seeking lots of negative attention – try to refocus your attention on the good things they do – making it easier for them to get your positive praise and attention – and ignore (to the degree you can) the negative attention seeking - making undesirable behavior a less efficient way to get your attention.
5. **PLAY WITH AND READ TO YOUR CHILDREN** - These are very powerful educational tools that also help manage behavior - use them a lot. Make it part of the routine. As I say at The Children's League: "*Rule #1 - Have fun with the kids.*" Silly play routines are also engaging and FUN.
6. **RUN 'EM RAGGED** – Physical exercise is another powerful tool to decrease anxiety and promote good sleep routines. This is true for you as well. For kids, this means active physical play (e.g., chase play, supervised outdoor play, scheduled and supervised jumping and climbing activities).
7. **LIMIT SCREEN TIME** – Media coverage of COVID-19 is extensive and overwhelming. Check into the news two times a day and entirely avoid exposing your children to it. Also, avoid using excessive screen time to entertain your children or escaping yourself when you could be positively attending to your children.
8. **PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE** – Lots of information out there on this – wash your hands a lot – routinely avoid unnecessary social contact – disinfect frequent contact points – teach good hygiene – model good hygiene
9. **BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL** – Stay calm – Focus on what you can control – Your children will follow your lead.
10. **HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN** – Develop a plan in case you or someone in your family gets the virus.

We are all together in this - but not. Although we are not able to get together face-to-face, there are other ways to get support from *The Children's League* (716/592-9331) and other resources like the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disaster Distress Hotline* at 800/985-5990 and the *Crisis Text Line*, an anonymous texting service available 24/7. Starting a conversation is easy. Text GOT5 to 741741 **Remember tip number one: TAKE CARE OF YOU!**