

# Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

May/June 2020

N F A N P A

## TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

### Kids worry more when they're kept in the dark

by Rachel Ehmke

News of the coronavirus COVID-19 is everywhere, from the front page of all the papers to the playground at school. Many parents are wondering how to bring up the epidemic in a way that will be reassuring and not make kids more worried than they already may be. Here is some advice from the experts at the Child Mind Institute.

#### Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus.

- Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry more. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. "You take on the news and you're the person who filters the news to your kid," explains Janine Domingues, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. Your goal is to help your children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news.

#### Be developmentally appropriate.

- Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.

#### Take your cues from your child.

- Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard



about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. You want to be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.

#### Deal with your own anxiety.

- "When you're feeling most anxious or panicked, that isn't the time to talk to your kids about what's happening with the coronavirus," warns Dr. Domingues. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child's questions.

#### Be reassuring.

- Children are very egocentric, so hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough to make them seriously worry that they'll catch it. It's helpful to reassure your child that kids actually seem to have milder symptoms.

#### Focus on what you're doing to stay safe.

- An important way to reassure kids is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Jamie Howard, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, notes, "Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe." We know that the coronavirus is transmitted mostly by coughing and touching surfaces. The CDC recommends thoroughly washing your hands as the primary means of staying healthy. So remind kids that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs) when they come in from

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## Nebraska Foster &amp; Adoptive Parent Association

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In these unprecedented times, we chose to change up this issue of the newsletter. Our usual format is to touch on lots of topics that deal with foster care. However this issue we felt that focusing on COVID-19 would be best. We have never dealt with this topic before and want to be able to fill up your resource toolbox with as much information as we can. We would also like to remind you that we are here for you. You can find our phone numbers and e-mails on page 2. Thank you very much for everything you do every day. God Bless You.

Tammy Welker RFC

Editor of Newsletter & Social Media

## Attention Foster Parents!

### Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to [Corinne@nfapa.org](mailto:Corinne@nfapa.org), send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MayJune2020>

We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. True or False. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry more.
2. Fill in the Blank. Your goal is to help your \_\_\_\_\_ that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news.
3. Fill in the Blanks. You can help your children by providing them with a \_\_\_\_\_, and being a positive force in their education."
4. Name 10 Tips for Navigating Online.
5. True or False. The most consistent key to success identified by these families was communication.
6. The relationship works best with an attitude of cooperation rather than one of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. True or False. Our children are barraged with information, images, news, and online bullying.
8. We need to become more aware and open to \_\_\_\_\_.
9. List 5 Self-Care Tips for Parents.
10. List 1 Family Activity you have added to your home since the quarantine.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

(Continued from page 1)

outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.

### Stick to routine.

- “We don’t like uncertainty, so staying rooted in routines and predictability is going to be helpful right now,” advises Dr. Domingues. This is particularly important if your child’s school or daycare shuts down. Make sure you are taking care of the basics just like you would during a spring break or summer vacation. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy.

### Keep talking.

- Tell kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. “Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open,” says Dr. Domingues. “You can say, ‘Even though we don’t have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, mom or dad will let you know, too.’”

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/#.Xn12DG4akNc.facebook>

## 7 Tips for Self-Care: A Mind-Body-Spirit Approach to De-Stress

by Lisa D. Maynard



Stress is a natural consequence for all parents, and often all the more so for foster and adoptive parents. Research findings suggest that some of the more specific stressors in fostering include the following issues: the traumatic histories of the children, attachment styles and challenges (theirs and ours), blending of family members, mental health concerns, medically fragile children, difficulty negotiating through the bureaucracy, and feeling unappreciated by the system as well as the children they care for.

Stress is not only an issue for the parents, their family systems and their workplace, but also for the children. Parents under extreme stress or chronic stress are at risk for illness affecting the mind, body and spirit. Stress impacts multiple domains of functioning. Sometimes that stress discharges onto those

we love most. Self-care is critical to maintaining physical, emotional and mental health. We owe it to our children, our partners and ourselves to be mindful of the impact that stress has on our overall well-being and our ability to keep our children safe.

Understand stress. Children in foster/adoptive families typically have suffered through terrifying experiences that have caused their brains to have a prolonged stress response. In other words, these children’s nervous systems are fried. Depending upon their life events, their temperaments and the interventions received, their behaviors and interactions will vary. As time goes on, certain situations may trigger unexpected, intense emotions and reactions. This fight, flight or freeze response is a basic survival instinct originating from the brain stem (primitive brain). The frontal lobe, the area of the brain which processes reason and logic, shuts down. The adrenal glands immediately start saturating the body with adrenaline, resulting in the increase of heart rate and breathing rate. This, in turn, increases the amount of energy within the muscle cells enabling the body to do whatever is necessary to survive. Run, fight, stop ... the response is instinctive, automatic.

Now, if this occurs too frequently, the function of the adrenal glands decreases, causing the body to maintain abnormally high levels of cortisol. This particular hormone wreaks havoc on the body, causing a myriad of health problems, most closely associated with depression, sleep disorders, anxiety and chronic pain. This is TRAUMA.

It hijacks the mind and body, disrupting all aspects of one’s life. These children are fearful of being hurt again, they haven’t learned trust because of the neglect or abandonment they’ve experienced, they are angry because they haven’t felt love and security, and they need patience and time to heal. They need routine and reasonable expectations as they learn to piece their lives back together. They may push away at times because they feel unworthy, but it is so important for them to discover that you can be depended upon. And this is exhausting and stressful for everyone. Fostering children is a difficult task and will challenge the best of us, but the following tips may help to make your path more comfortable so you can enjoy and grow along with your children.

Become attuned. You are a caretaker of children with special needs. You are selfless, loving and generous of heart. And these children have trauma, they have deep pain, and their behaviors can be demanding. And you are human. You will feel stress. Don’t ignore it. Tune in. Notice what is happening in your body, in your mind, to your very spirit. Remember that you must “put on your oxygen mask first” in order to help others in need.

### TIP #1: Body-Mind.

The first step in dealing with stress is knowing when you are stressed. Be conscious of your body. Are your shoulders

tight? Are you grinding your teeth? Is your breathing shallow? Is your heart rate increasing? Do you feel pain anywhere in your body? And what about those eyebrows? Working on a nice big wrinkle there? Do you have stomach discomfort? Bathroom issues? Or maybe you are unreasonably fatigued. Make comparisons of how your body reacts during both calm and stressful conditions. Do a body scan at different times of the day — notice how you can ease tension by relaxing your shoulders or your jaw, or by closing your eyes and taking several deep belly breaths. Keep a journal, jotting down your responses.

Next, be conscious of your mind. Any negative thoughts going on? Are you beating yourself up about not being the perfect parent? Are you wishing you were somewhere else or in a different time? Are you thinking resentful, angry thoughts? Are you disillusioned with the child or even with yourself? Do you want to escape, maybe to the refrigerator, maybe to Tahiti? Maybe you feel like crying or staying in bed for the weekend. Simply stop and notice. No judgment, no critique.

### **TIP #2: Breathe.**

Yes! There are several breathing exercises that take less than a minute. As stated earlier, stress causes the body to react with quick, shallow breathing, alerting the brain to begin the stress response. By consciously breathing slowly and deeply, the brain will calm down the body by decreasing the heart rate and blood pressure. This in turn allows the brain's frontal lobe to continue making rational decisions. If you consciously and repeatedly respond to stressors with breathing, your body and mind will eventually become programmed to calm itself without your conscious effort.

If you need some guidance on breathing techniques, check out the following apps:

- Breathe2Relax
- Universal Breathing — Pranayama
- Paced Breathing
- Relax Stress and Anxiety Relief
- Prana Breath
- Breathing Zone

### **TIP #3: Exercise.**

Sometimes we are simply too tired to even think about exercise. We think we need to spend 90 minutes in aerobic activity. Start slow, keep it simple. Try 20 minutes of aerobic activity — even if it's dancing in your kitchen to a few songs on the radio. Or take a brisk walk. Research findings suggest that this is enough to produce the necessary endorphins in your brain to combat stress. If you hate the thought of exercising, then consider it playtime and do something active with your children or friends, like bike riding, hiking or swimming.

Yoga has been used in addressing complex trauma — consider a yoga class for you and your child. Classes that

emphasize slow, steady movement, deep breathing and gentle stretching do wonders for stress relief. (Satyananda, Hatha Yoga and Power Yoga). Yoga serves to calm and connect the mind, body and spirit. You don't have to be flexible, bendable or in "great shape" to give it a try.

### **TIP #4: Mindfulness meditation.**

This is not really meditation, although it can include it, but more so a practice of focusing one's awareness on the present moment. It has been proven to be such an effective de-stressor that many schools across the country are implementing this as part of their daily activities. Living in the present moment, practicing self-love, being compassionate toward others are some of the basic tenants of this lifestyle. Some resources to check out are:

- [mindful.org](http://mindful.org) (guided meditations, soothing music)
- [Happify.com](http://Happify.com) (Very short animations that children and adults enjoy)
- YouTube short, guided meditations
- Ted Talks on mindfulness

### **Tip #5: Express yourself.**

Get your creative juices flowing. Research shows that engaging in creative self-expression helps to reduce stress and depression, increases positive emotions, and may even increase immune system function. Creative arts such as dancing, painting, drawing, writing all channel energy in a positive direction and build "cognitive reserve" — just one more powerful mind-body approach to overall wellness.

Find the creative outlet that best fits your personality:

- Gather a group of friends and attend a one-night painting class — creativity and connection.
- Take up music lessons — guitar, piano, harp or tuba — find an instrument that speaks to your soul and make your own kind of music.
- Paint an enso — paint a circle with a single brush, in one fluid, expressive stroke. The Japanese enso represents strength and elegance, the universe in perfect imperfection.
- Free writing — release your thoughts and emotions as they come to you, no need for accurate spelling, punctuation or grammar — just write, free of self-judgment and self-criticism. Free writing can clear your mind, break through creativity blocks, and may even lead to new insights.

### **Tip #6: Connect with your five senses.**

Taking a few tips from my friend and colleague, Sue Badeau, put together a "go bag" filled with sensory items that sooth your spirit. Some ideas to engage all five senses:

- A soothing scent such as an essential oil like lavender or vanilla;
- Hold a "worry stone," which is a polished, smooth

gemstone and rub it between your fingers to decrease anxiety and stress;

- Save a sound clip stored on your phone — waves on the ocean, your favorite music, the sound of children laughing — something that makes you feel peaceful or makes you smile;
- Keep a zip lock bag of chocolate nibs, peppermints or ginger to snack on — this is a two for one (smell and taste);
- Clip a picture of your fantasy (or real) favorite place on earth — keep it in your wallet or saved as the background on your phone or computer. “Go” there whenever the urge to escape hits.

### **TIP #7: Put on those rose-colored glasses.**

Even though life can be a struggle at times, there is always a glimmer of good, a silver lining, a rosy day ahead. Consider some of these suggestions.

- Focus on the positive to keep yourself afloat.
- Don’t go it alone, connect with friends.
- Pamper yourself with a little alone time — a good book, a warm bath, maybe even a night away to regenerate.
- Decorate your space with daily affirmations. These are reminders that you are valued, you are grateful, you can’t control anything but yourself, you forgive yourself and others — or anything else you need to remind yourself that today is a gift.
- Stop and smell the roses — fill your home with fresh flowers that you planted (gardening can be creative and grounded) or purchased.

Pack your toolbox with a variety of strategies. Be thoughtful and considerate of yourself. Be gentle, kind and caring as you would with others. It is the best gift you can give yourself and your children.

*Lisa Maynard, LMSW, ACSW, TCTSY-F, is a licensed social worker with expertise in trauma, attachment and adoption. Maynard is an implementation specialist with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) for the National Adoption Mental Health Competency Initiative (NTI) currently piloting in nine sites across the U.S. She is also a senior consultant with the National Center on Adoption and Permanency (NCAP). Maynard earned a masters of social work from State University of New York, Buffalo. She has a Trauma Counseling Certification from State University of New York, Buffalo, post-graduate certificate in adoption therapy from Hunter College of Social Work, certificate in traumatic stress studies through the Justice Resource Institute from Cambridge, Mass., and is a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt. Maynard is one of fewer than 100 in the world to hold a certificate in Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga.*

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<https://fosteringfamilies.today.com/fostering-families-today-feature/7-tips-for-self-care-a-mind-body-spirit-approach-to-de-stress/>

## **CDC Reveals Teenage Suicide Has Increased 76 Percent In Last Decade**

*by Anonymous*

What is driving the rise in suicides among 10-19-year-olds? Is it social media? Technology? Bullying? Opiate addiction? Do we even have an answer? Regardless of the cause, with the CDC revealing teenage suicides have increased 76 percent in the last decade. Thus, an intervention must come first while we search for the reasons.

### **TEENAGE SUICIDE INCREASES FROM 2007 – 2017**

In 2017, suicide was the second biggest cause of death for 10-24-year-olds in the United States. While suicide has fairly consistently been a factor in premature deaths, from 2000-2007, the rates had declined for ages 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24.

Now the statistics from the CDC point to a significant increase.

- An overall increase in suicide for 10-24 years olds was 56%
- 15-19-year-olds had a greater increase of 76%.
- The rate of the increase for 15-19-year-olds rose to 10% from 2014 to 2017. Previously it had been 3%.
- Ages 15-24 equated to 6,252 suicidal deaths in 2017. Homicides for that age bracket, in comparison, were 4,905.
- 517 children from ages 10-14 committed suicide
- According to the Youth Risk Behavioral report by the CDC.
- 2% of teenagers 14-18 seriously considered suicide
- 6% made a serious plan, and
- 4% attempted suicide at least once
- 4% attempted suicide and were injured
- 5% felt extremely sad and hopeless at least two days a week

### **POTENTIAL CAUSES FOR INCREASING SUICIDE RATES**

Attempting to pinpoint the cause for the rising suicidal rates is primarily speculation. Most experts feel it is related to:

- The opioid crisis
- Cyberbullying
- Technology/Social Media
- Increased reporting due to less stigma

### **THE OPIOID CRISIS AND TEENAGE SUICIDE**

When we talk about drug overdose, it’s difficult for medical professionals to determine if the overdose was part of an intentional suicide plan. One thing we do know is that the opioid epidemic affects primarily 20-30 year olds, which is the age of most young parents. A psychiatrist at Cincinnati Children’s

hospital looked at 3 months of records of 300 children in 2016 who had been admitted due to suicidal behavior. Dr. Daniel Nelson, the psychiatrist who noted the pattern, reportedly told the Washington Post that he noticed while looking at a map of the overdose, that the suicidal attempts were occurring in the same areas.

Dr. Nelson claims that from all of his hospitalized patients, 25% of them have adults fighting addiction. Those children of the parents who died from opioids, then become part of the foster care system or are being raised by their grandparents.

Sadly, once one person commits suicide, there is a 5% increase in suicides. It's almost as if the one act gave someone the strength to do it themselves. Additionally, just attempting to process and recover from a classmate who committed suicide or being in a classroom with a high percentage of kids dealing with the parents' addictions at home creates more anxiety and depression in all of the children. That is a tremendous amount of pain and sadness to make sense of when the adults around them aren't able to make sense of it either.

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR**

Many countries note that with an increase in technology usage, including social media, consistent screen time on phones, computers, and tablets, there also seems to be an increase in suicidal behavior. Currently, no studies can substantially state that there is an increase, but through social media and the internet, children and young adults have access to both harmful and helpful things that can affect their mental health.

With information should come responsibility. Sadly, that is not exactly how it works. People currently have so many modes to communicate anonymously with others. That can be beneficial if you need to speak to someone regarding an issue you wish to remain private about, but it can also leave you vulnerable to the cruel and harsh things people can say to you.

With the availability of information, you have the choice to search for suicidal prevention groups, therapy groups, a call line or 10 different ways to kill yourself. The choice is yours. That's a substantial choice to make when you simultaneously are being bombarded with the vision of how "perfect" someone else's life may appear, harassment by strangers or classmates, or just being tired of acting like your life is perfect on social media. This chronic influx of information, perceptions, and attempting to filter what's real vs fake can be overwhelming, creating anxiety and depression.

## **CYBERBULLYING AND SUICIDE**

Bullying no longer isolates itself in the schoolyard.

In fact, a report written by Professor Ann John of Swansea University with assistance from the University of Oxford and Birmingham came up with an alarming statistic and patterns related to cyberbullying.

Professor Ann John and associates looked at 150,000

children and young adults over a 21 year period in 30 different countries. The final analysis was published in JMIR Publications.

Cyberbullying is defined as an act of intimidation, threatening or derogatory and negative messages via an electronic device. It's an almost inescapable form of bullying for the victims. Usually, a bully's platform of choice is social media.

According to the report, young adults and children ages 25 and younger are twice as likely to self-harm or behave in a suicidal manner if they have been cyberbullied. Additionally, while less so of the victim, the perpetrator is more likely to have suicidal thoughts than one who is not a perpetrator. This is especially true if the bully is male. He is more likely to be depressed and exhibit suicidal behavior despite the bullying behavior.

While the frequency of cyberbullying differs based on the country and general location, cyberbullying is estimated to occur to 15-35% of young persons, and about 10-20% of individuals admitted to having bullied others through an electronic device.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY TEENAGERS**

Social media is both positive and negative. While it decreases stigma regarding depression, anxiety, and mental illnesses, it also creates an unrealistic illusion of life.

Indeed, what used to be just a contest between neighbors as to who had the newest, coolest car now is a competition for likes, shares, and thousands of follows to determine if you are popular and successful.

Now you can't tell how anyone's life truly is because all you see are the beautiful pics, the great party, the fancy clothes, etc. There are fewer young adults actually spending time physically together in order to determine the bigger picture; instead, they only know what is on the screen.

Add the drama of social media. Here, you'll find the suicides streamed online before the medium catches it and removes it.

Social media is like an instant fix of attention if you know how to play it. Or, it can be an instant deflator if you are on the dark side of it. Children and teenagers don't have the emotional and mental skills to learn how to cope with all that it presents. It's literally like dropping the entire world at their feet and telling them to handle all the crazy, unfamiliar, and sometimes harsh things that can happen.

Learn the impact of bullying on children and teenagers.

## **REMOVING THE STIGMA OF SUICIDE ADDING TO THE STATISTICS**

Along with the negatives of social media and the internet is a huge positive. The awareness and removal of stigmas associated with mental illness and suicides are such positives. Whenever there is a new opening for awareness to the public, it can be difficult to determine how much of the new numbers are due to an actual increase in the incidences versus how

many of the new numbers are due to new reporting.

We see this occur in many things: rape, domestic violence, incest, drug use, divorce, and more. The public consistently gains an understanding of the importance of letting these things out of the closet. Therefore, we see an increase in the numbers.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE ESCALATION OF TEENAGE SUICIDE RATES**

The CDC revealing a 76% increase in teenage suicides in the last decade should be a cause for concern. There should not be a question about that, but a question of why. Sadly, many feel the current generation has all of the perks and conveniences that technology and a wealthy country has to offer. We need to become more aware and open to listening. Most importantly, we must hear what our children and teenagers are trying to tell us.

The surface of any issue can appear one way to us. However, it might be far more difficult than we as adults can even fathom. Our children are barraged with information, images, news, and online bullying. Plus, they still face many family issues. Stay aware of your children's behavior and open to understanding how their world is affecting them. Your awareness can prevent teenage suicide.

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<https://www.powerofpositivity.com/teenage-suicide-rates-increase/>

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## **Self-Care in the Time of Coronavirus**

**For parents, prioritizing your own well-being benefits your whole family**

*by Rae Jacobson*

When you're a parent, self-care often slips to the bottom of the list. But taking care of yourself isn't a luxury. It's essential. And during this difficult time, when children are home and stress is running high, it's more important than ever. Here are five tips from our clinicians that can help.

### **Make time for yourself**

Right now, much of the personal time that was part of daily routines — commutes, time alone at home or at the store, social time with friends — is not available for folks with kids at home. Without it, we have to be intentional about creating space to recharge and decompress. This could look like taking a shower or bath, walking around the block alone (or with your dog), or designating time to read or simply zone out after the kids have gone to bed.

### **Prioritize healthy choices**

The added stress and lack of structure we're all experiencing right now can make it easy to slip into habits that feel good in the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. "Make

sure you're eating properly, try to get enough sleep (but not too much!), and create a routine that includes physical activity," recommends Jill Emanuele, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. This doesn't mean pressuring yourself to get into tip-top shape, or not eating ice cream or binging your favorite shows. It does mean being thoughtful and intentional about how you're treating yourself and your body.

### **Be realistic**

"Perfectionism and the coronavirus don't mix," says David Anderson, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. "It's time to be exceedingly realistic, both at work and as a parent." Avoid burnout by setting realistic expectations and giving yourself grace if you can't meet them. "Practice forgiveness and self-compassion," says Dr. Anderson. Parents should remind themselves that these are unprecedented times. "There's no playbook for this. Remember you're doing your best during a very difficult time. Cut yourself some slack."

### **Set boundaries**

Anxiety is rampant right now. With so much worry and uncertainty floating around it can be easy to absorb other people's fears and concerns without even realizing it. If you have a friend or family member who's in the habit of sending worst-case-scenario news or is prone to sending anxiety-provoking text messages, practice a little emotional distancing. Let them know you sympathize but that you're taking a break from worrying news, or simply hit the Do Not Disturb button. You can always reconnect when things are calmer.

### **Reconnect with things you enjoy**

Think proactively of things you can do with this enforced time at home. Get back in touch with hobbies or activities you enjoy but rarely have time for, or make the choice to learn a new skill. Maybe there's a knitting project you've always wanted to try, but you've been too busy. Or you've been meaning to learn how to needlepoint. Maybe you love jigsaw puzzles but with rushing between work and home and caring for kids, it's been years since you had the time to do one. If young children make solo activities unrealistic, seek out activities you can enjoy together, like baking bread, or making art.

Finally, remember, being kind to yourself will not only help you stay calm during this difficult time, it will help ensure that you have the bandwidth you need to take good care of your family. When you're running on fumes, caring for others can tax your already depleted resources to breaking point. But when you prioritize your needs, you're filling the tank, emotionally and physically, and that means you'll be in a position to offer comfort and care to others when they need it most.

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<https://childmind.org/article/self-care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/#.Xp0idpLm0BM.mailto>

# Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association Foster Parent In-service Training Offered at two locations!

Saturday, August 29, 2020 (**NEW DATE**)

Time 9:00am—4:00pm

(lunch on your own)

*St Paul Lutheran Church*

*1515 South Harrison Ave, Garden Room*

*Grand Island, NE*

Saturday, June 13, 2020

Time 9:00am—4:00pm

(lunch on your own)

*NFAPA Office*

*3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D*

*Lincoln, NE*



**Do you know what to do and say when a child has some  
challenging behaviors?  
Attend this *FLIP IT* training!**

It explains *FLIP IT*'s four simple steps for transforming  
challenging behavior in young children:

F – Feelings

L – Limits

I – Inquiries

P – Prompts

This straight forward and practical approach to addressing behaviors can help children learn about their feelings and gain self-control.

***Instructor—Terry Robinson***

Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association  
Central Service Area Resource Family Consultant

Register online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Inservice2020>

or call the office at 402.476.2273 or 800.257.0176

Participants will receive up to 6-CEU's.

**Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
Facilitated by Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association**







## Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

May is National Foster Care Month. The Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of Children and Family Services would like to THANK all of our foster and adoptive parents throughout the state. Nebraska currently has 3,144 children in out of home care. Foster Parents play an instrumental role in the child welfare system and the wellbeing of vulnerable children. Your impact on children and families is incredible as you care for children and support families. We celebrate you and all you do!

COVID-19 and the subsequent public health crisis has forced all Nebraskans to adapt and change our everyday lives. During this pandemic there continues to be children who enter the foster care system due to abuse or neglect and needing a foster home. We appreciate you for continuing to open your homes and families to children needing the security of a loving home. We know that there are unique challenges families are facing right now and you continue to answer the call for those in need.

These are unprecedented times as children are not able to attend school and we are being asked to shelter at home, practicing social distancing to help stop the spread of COVID-19. We know these are difficult times for everyone, and we are especially grateful to all our foster parents who care for our children, assist them with their school work, and provide a safe home for them. You are changing lives every day and we are grateful. Thank you for all you do.

## NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Over the past few weeks, we have had to all make changes. Because of the DHM we have had to cancel some support groups. Until we know it is safe to resume meeting, support groups are on hold or meeting online. Please contact the RFC in your area to see when support groups will be back up and running!

### Contact a Resource Family Consultant for more information:

Jolie Camden (Panhandle Area): 308-672-3658

Tammy Welker (Columbus): 402-989-2197

Terry Robinson (Central): 402-460-7296

Robbi Blume (FACES): 402-853-1091

NFAPA Office: 877-257-0176

## Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association Foster Parent In-Service Training

### Building & Empowering Family Connections

Presented by Amy Schnacker, TBRI Practitioner, Occupational Therapist, Foster/Adoptive parent

**Saturday August 8, 2020 (NEW DATE)**

**9:00am-4:00pm**

**(lunch on your own)**

**Harvest Christian Fellowship**

**1501 South Dewey**

**North Platte, NE**

You will learn how to handle challenging behaviors using the three principles of Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) and understand the meaning behind the behaviors, brain chemistry, and how to help heal and connect with your child.

Register online: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Inservice2020>

(Continued from page 7)

## How Mindfulness Can Help During COVID-19

### Tips for calming anxiety during a difficult time

by Rae Jacobson

With schools closed and many parents working from home without childcare for the foreseeable future, it's hard not to start spiraling. Responsibilities seem endless, the situation dire, and it seems like time to yourself has become a thing of the past...

Take a deep breath. Literally. Feel a little better?

These are trying times, but incorporating mindful practices into your daily routine can help calm anxiety and build healthy coping skills. Here are some tips from our clinicians on making mindfulness work for you and your family.

#### It doesn't have to be complicated

Being mindful is what it sounds like. Taking time to focus on the present, being intentional and thoughtful about where you are and how you are feeling. Trying to center your thoughts and be in the moment. Sounds simple, but it takes work, especially now when concerns about what the future holds feel so pressing. Mindful activities can help. "Mindfulness isn't complicated," says Jill Emanuele, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. Here are some simple activities she recommends:

- **Squeeze Muscles:** Starting at your toes, pick one muscle and squeeze it tight. Count to five. Release, and notice how your body changes. Repeat exercise moving up your body.
- **Belly Breathing:** Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (deflate).
- **Mindful Meal:** Pay attention to the smell, taste and look of your food. No multitasking.
- **Meditation:** Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position. Pick something to focus on, like your breath. When your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath.
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Notice their shapes, textures and colors.
- **Coloring:** Color something. Focus on the colors and designs.
- **Listening to Music:** Focus on the whole song, or listen specifically to the voice or an instrument.

#### Make time for mindfulness

Right now much of the personal time that used to be part of our daily routines — commutes, time alone at home, going to the store — is not available. This means it's extra important to be intentional about creating space to recharge. Deciding to set

time aside each day to practice mindful activities is a great place to start, says Dr. Emanuele. "The morning, before everyone is awake, can be a great time to really ground yourself." Morning mindfulness can help set the tone for the day. "Do deep breathing, meditate, exercise, whatever mindfulness activity works for you," she recommends. Mindfulness doesn't have to be elaborate: "You can try mindful eating or mindful drinking with a cup of coffee. Sit there and just be in the moment. That's mindfulness. Taking five minutes to do that before the day begins is even more important now because this is not our typical routine and we're going to feel very, very out of sorts."

#### Limit multi-tasking

Right now it can feel like trying to do ten things at once is the only way anything will get done. For example, trying to fold laundry, make dinner and watch your child all while on a work call.

But, explains Joanna Stern, PsyD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, multitasking rarely works, and can actually increase stress. "Multitasking is a myth," says Dr. Stern. Instead, she suggests achievable goals for the day, trying to focus on one thing at a time. For example, scheduling work calls during naptime, allowing kids to have a little extra screen time while you make dinner, or asking older children to help fold the laundry while you finish cleaning up.

#### Practice mindfulness as a family

Mindfulness, explains David Anderson, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, is "Anything that helps everyone take a moment to slow down, stay present, and come together." Designating time to practice mindful activities as a family will help everyone feel less anxious. It could be a daily family yoga session, or a quiet walk in the woods as a group, taking time to focus on the way the air feels, the sound of the birds and the smell of the trees. Another good family mindfulness idea is asking everyone to mention one good thing they heard or saw that day over dinner.

#### Make peace with uncertainty

This situation is one of extreme uncertainty. We don't know what will happen, how long it will last or what things will be like when it's over. One thing we do know, however, is that worrying about it won't change the outcome. Learning how to tolerate the uncertainty is a huge part of building healthy coping skills for ourselves, which we then want to model for our children. "Right now it's very easy to let your brain spin out with the frightening possibilities," warns Dr. Anderson. "Practicing mindfulness helps bring us back to the present, and away from the brink."

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<https://childmind.org/article/how-mindfulness-can-help-during-covid-19/#.Xp0h945M9No.mailto>

# Anxiety and Coping With the Coronavirus

## Managing worry — your kids' and your own

by Rachel Ehmke



We're all on edge because of the coronavirus. Our daily lives have been disrupted, we aren't sure what tomorrow may bring, and for many of us the nonstop news and social media coverage isn't helping.

Our experts say that dealing with your own anxiety can be the most powerful way to make sure your kids feel secure. If you or your children are feeling worried, learning how to deal with that anxiety in a healthy way can help the whole family be more resilient, both now and when the pandemic is finally over.

### Tolerating uncertainty

“The treatment for anxiety isn't to make the fear go away, it's to manage the fear and tolerate uncertainty,” explains Jerry Bubrick, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. “So for the kids who've been in treatment for this, it's almost like they have an immune response or they're vaccinated against uncertainty. They've been training for this and now they're able to put their skills in place and for many of them the coronavirus is not affecting them as much as those of us who aren't used to dealing with uncertainty on a daily level.”

Many parents are having a harder time dealing with COVID-19 than their children, and some of the anxiety that kids are experiencing may be inadvertently passed on by worried parents.

As parents, we need to be modeling for our kids how to react to stressful times by coping with anxiety in healthy ways. “I think we have to be mindful of the present and stay focused on what is actually happening and not let ourselves go to worst case scenarios,” Dr. Bubrick recommends. “If we're showing our kids catastrophic thinking and head-in-your-hands worry, and crying and fear, then they're going to learn that's the way to handle the times now.”

### How to stay calm

**Be smart about what you're reading.** While we should make

sure we are informed about how best to keep our families safe, we should also be thoughtful about what we are reading online to make sure it's actually helpful. It is easy to inadvertently get sucked into reading every update as it comes in, or clicking on, in Dr. Bubrick's words, “the doomsday apocalypse kind of stories, which I would consider to be ‘mental health fake news.’”

Consider putting a limit on the number of articles you read, or for how long you will read about the coronavirus each day. If you're consuming media that is making you anxious — pictures of lines at stores, people hoarding supplies, celebrities getting diagnosed — take a break. Being informed is one thing; being overexposed is another.

**Focus on what you're doing right now.** Remind yourself that you are doing your part to minimize the risks by practicing social distancing and keeping your hands and your home clean. While it is sensible to be prepared for the future, Dr. Bubrick recommends “focusing on making sure we're in the moment, and dealing with things in the present.”

Stop yourself if notice that you are getting carried away with “what ifs.” It will help if you can set aside time to regularly practice mindfulness, which is a tool to help people stay grounded and calm in the present moment — not caught up in the future or the past. Parents can practice mindfulness alone or with children.

**Rely on routines.** Establishing a routine that involves exercise, regular meals and healthy amounts of sleep are also crucial to regulating our moods and our worries. If your old routine is no longer possible because of COVID-19 precautions, look for ways to be flexible and start a new routine. Remind yourself that life is still continuing, and ground yourself by doing things like making agendas and setting goals.

### Checking in with kids

When kids are feeling anxious, it may or may not be clear to parents. “We shouldn't be looking for just one thing,” says Dr. Bubrick. “We should be ready to handle a variety of different expressions of anxiety.” Anxiety could look like:

- Reassurance-seeking (Are we going to be okay? Is grandpa going to be okay?)
- Reluctance to separate from parents
- Physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches
- Moodiness and irritability
- Tantrums or meltdowns
- Trouble sleeping

Kids may not always be able to express how they are feeling. For younger children, Dr. Bubrick suggests using a feelings chart instead of saying “Tell me how anxious you are.” With a feelings chart, which you can find on the internet, you can ask kids to point to the feeling they are having now. Parents can also use a traffic light chart to help kids share how intense their feeling is — a red light means they feel overwhelmed, a yellow light is medium and a green light is okay.

For kids who are more able to articulate how they are feeling, Dr. Bubrick says it is better to ask what psychologists call “forced choice questions.” “If you ask a vague question you’re going to get a vague answer,” he says. “So instead of asking ‘How was your day?’ which is pretty vague, maybe ask, ‘Did your anxiety get in the way of you having a good day today?’” he suggests.

If you’re wondering about a teenager, Dr. Bubrick recommends talking about yourself first. “You can say something like, ‘I saw this article today and it made me wonder about this and that. Did you see something like that? What’s your reaction to it?’”

## Helping anxious kids

**Structure their day.** As parents we often think that setting boundaries for a child is a way to make our lives easier, but in fact kids thrive on them, too. It is easy for children to get bored or fretful if they are facing a day without structure, and anxiety can thrive under those circumstances.

Make sure that you are structuring their days when they are cooped up at home. Alternate chores or schoolwork with more fun activities and periods of free time. Make sure kids are still getting the chance to exercise and socialize with friends via video chats and social media if they are on it.

**Avoid giving too much reassurance.** For kids of all ages, Dr. Bubrick recommends avoiding getting into a cycle of providing too much reassurance. Kids can come to rely on the reassurance and want to hear it more and more often — and when a parent isn’t able to give them complete reassurance their anxiety can worsen.

Instead, remind kids of the things they are doing to take care of themselves (like washing their hands and staying indoors) and encourage them to focus on being in the moment. They can practice mindfulness activities alone or with you.

**Model calm yourself.** Don’t share your worries with your children, and if you are feeling anxious, find a way to ground yourself. “After this crisis is over, your kids are going to walk away from this having learned things,” says Dr. Bubrick. “What will they have learned from you in the way you handled this? Will they look back and say ‘Wow, I’m really impressed with how mom and dad held it together?’ Or are they going to walk away and think the world is a scary place?”

**Look for the positive.** Finally, Dr. Bubrick recommends looking for the silver linings. “I spoke to a family this morning on Skype and they said, ‘You know, our kids are all together for the first time in months and they’re playing games together and they’re laughing together and we’re spending time together.’ So there are silver linings, you just have to look for them.

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<https://childmind.org/article/anxiety-and-coping-with-coronavirus/#.Xp0lRqWH5kw.mailto>

# Co-Parenting Gets Children Home from Foster Care Safer and Faster

by Dr. Stan Waddell

*Yesterday, The Chronicle reported on a pilot program in New York City that will use a co-parenting strategy to improve the odds of reunification of children with birth parents. Following is a column from our sister publication, Fostering Families Today, on the virtues of co-parenting.*

When children are removed from their homes, they still have parents who will rightfully remain part of their lives. In fact, when children are safely returned to their birth family, this is the best possible outcome for the child. According to federal data, the majority of children placed in foster care return home with their parents. If this is the best outcome for children, how can foster parents develop a healthy relationship with birth parents to increase the likelihood of success when children go home?

Several foster parents with more than 100 years of combined foster parenting experience have provided some advice for successfully working with birth families. Their experiences, as well as the experiences of several birth parents whose children were in care, are shared below.

## Co-Parenting Communication

The most consistent key to success identified by these families was of communication. Children and families will have service, visitation and reunification plans at a minimum. With all this formal communication going on, sometimes the informal communication between foster parents and birth parents can suffer the most.

“One of the reasons that birth parents and foster parents get off on the wrong foot many times is that the rules are not clear — or the expectations,” said Sherry, a birth parent of a child who spent time in foster care. “It would help if foster parents and birth parents were given an opportunity to sit down and talk to each other about what their expectations are, what the rules are, and discuss any questions that each may have.”

Birth parents often are not sure what to do during visits. That is a chance for foster parents and/or caseworkers to take initiative to ask respectfully if birth parents have questions, fears or concerns.

Respect is a vital key to communication. Birth parents often have strong emotions when their children come into care, and oftentimes these emotions come out as anger that can be directed toward foster parents. Foster parents, on the other hand, know the worst times of the family.

“When we hold, love and tend the physical, emotional and mental wounds it is very hard not to ‘demonize’ the parent,” said Tara, a foster parent of 12 years. “We absolutely shouldn’t, but it often happens when you watch 24/7 what these kids go through.”

Several foster parents pointed out that communication

should be handled as it is with divorced couples. In fact, one foster parent felt that what helped them develop useful skills was reading several books on divorce. It is important that foster parents lean on professional/personal support systems to help them navigate the early parts of this relationship, and deal with the strong emotions they face from birth families, as well as deal with their conflicting emotions.

## Relationship Builders

Knowing that relationships between foster and birth parents can be shaky in the beginning, as well as other times like holidays or important events, it is important to have ways to build that relationship. Both birth parents and foster parents felt that it took a lot of work with a constant awareness of attitudes and keeping attitudes as positive as possible. The relationship works best with an attitude of cooperation rather than one of adversity.

“It is key to keep the focus on their child,” said Brett, a foster parent in New Mexico. “We (foster parents) are there to keep their kids safe and help them be able to bring their kids home in a safe way. We both have the same goal to make their family safe.”

Foster and birth parents identified several ideas for building relationships:

- Support visitation (i.e., be on time and be polite to one another).
- Be prepared for anger. Show compassion and do not get angry in return.
- Share information about your family and background.
- Assure birth parents that you are not trying to replace them and you will do your best to keep their child safe.
- Include birth parents in meetings, and make them an active part of the team (i.e. school, medical visits, sporting events, church).
- Ask for input from the birth parent on what they want their child to wear for school pictures.
- Ask birth parents questions about what the child likes and dislikes.
- Answer any questions the birth parents have for foster parents, such as where their child sleeps, whom they interact with, and how they are doing in school.
- Find creative ways to increase contact between visits (i.e. email, letters, private Facebook page, Skype, etc.).
- Help prepare the foster child for visits with his/her birth parents. Talk positively about them and get there with a positive attitude.
- Take photos during visits; have copies made for the parent and the child.
- Brainstorm with the birth parent on ideas for visits. If problems develop, ask the birth parent to help solve them.

## Mentoring Parents

Children come into the foster care system at the lowest point of a birth parent’s life and their family history. The primary

goal for that family will always be safe reunification. One role that foster parents can play is as a mentor for birth parents once a therapeutic relationship is established.

“We (foster parents) need to help birth parents change their view of the system from that of a system against them to a support system to help them find ways to best use the system to their advantage to get their families back together,” said Bonnie, a foster parent in Kansas.

When birth parents trust that the system is not there to keep them from their children but to help stabilize the family situation, it will benefit the children.

As a mentor parent, the following may be skills birth parents need:

- Ways to keep a child on a schedule/routine and setting priorities.
- Ways to work with mental health/school on meeting the needs of the child.
- Help to learn appropriate ways to ask for help in times of need and/or crisis.
- Help in learning how they can find and utilize community support.
- Help to brainstorm ideas that make visitation a successful relationship building time.
- Help to learn appropriate ways to build new positive connections with children as well as support systems (i.e., extended family, community supports).
- Model positive parenting skills (i.e., praising children in front of parents and praising parents for their positive behaviors and actions).
- Help to understand key developmental tasks and how they can work with their children in achieving those developmental tasks.
- Help to understand discipline techniques that have been successful with their children.

When foster parents establish a positive therapeutic relationship with birth parents:

- Relationships between birth parents, foster parents and child are less stressful.
- Building support systems increases support for the child and family.
- There is a greater chance of a quick, successful reunification.

The relationship between foster parents and birth parents can play a key role in a successful reunification. A child’s successful reunification with birth parents is more likely when foster parents are engaged in the process.

Dr. Stan Waddell is the national director of specialty training for Centene Behavioral Health. He has worked with at-risk children and families for 30-plus years.

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<https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/child-welfare-2/co-parenting-children-foster-care-safer-faster/39586>

# Coronavirus and Foster Care: How Foster Families and Child Welfare are Struggling during the Pandemic

by Dr. John DeGarmo

“We are lacking consistency, routine, and an overall feeling of stability and security. These kids have had their whole world changed, and now it is being shaken up again,” said Jo Larson, a Minnesota foster parent.

Covid 19, or the Coronavirus, has upended foster care and child welfare, leaving foster parents across the nation trying to find not only answers, but resources and support. Well beyond the lack of groceries, baby wipes, diapers, and even toilet paper, foster parents are struggling.

For many foster parents, the lack of supervision has been an especially challenging one. Many foster parents are employed full time, and work during the day, while the children placed in their home from foster care are either in school, or at day care. “Struggling with the fact that the kids are out of school but I still have to work. We need to find someone to keep them. When I get off work and return home, I try and teach them in a 2 hour period,” said foster parent Ashley Yeske. South Dakota foster parent Sheri Berg states that, “I work in healthcare so staying home with my kids from foster care right now is not an option.”

To be sure, these are challenges that many parents from traditional families are also facing. Yet, for foster parents, the challenges are deeper than that. One of the responsibilities that foster parents face is transporting the children in their home to visitations with their birth parents and biological family members. Often times, visitations take place at child welfare offices, while other times, visitations may occur at public places, such as parks, restaurants, churches, and other public venues. Visitations are important as they help to maintain the relationship between both child and adult. Along with this, many foster parents have very strong relationships with the birth parents and during visitations, trust is built and children can grow and develop in a healthy fashion, as a result.

Oregon foster parent Samantha Mae has been struggling with visitations during the coronavirus pandemic. “Having to send our children from foster care to visits even though some of us are at a higher risk has been hard,” said Mae. “Our 9 month old foster son is just getting over a nasty cold with an ear infection, we have all had one thing or another since thanksgiving and our immunity is so low, yet we still have to send him.”

Foster parent Kari Pearce, from Alabama, is another struggling with visitations during this time of uncertainty. “I get a little worried about visit because sometimes the bio parents come sick and then it’s transferred to the rest of my family,” she said.

Other foster parents are faced with the difficulty of getting the services and support they and the children placed in their home both need. Michigan foster parent Bonnie Wood faces the lack of support from her agency. “Our agency closed and can only do phone home visits.” Essential services such as therapy sessions, drug counseling, and even court appearances have also been affected by Covid 19. Many agencies are having to re-think how they provide services for their foster parent, and for the children.

Like so many others, caseworkers are now working from home, and are unable to visit their foster parents, and provide the assistance and resources they need. As a result, some foster parents feel as if they have been forgotten, or even ignored, during the pandemic. “We have two teens who joined us two weeks ago. With 4 kids total here, I just feel like I don’t have answers for them,” said California foster parent Catherine Loew.

Child welfare workers in Kentucky have had to suspend monthly visits with foster care families, despite the fact that nearly 10,000 children are placed in the state’s foster care system. Perhaps even more disturbing is that Covid 19 has limited in person investigations in regards to abuse or neglect to a child. State Governor Andy Beshear has limited these visits and investigations due to “imminent risk or high risk-only circumstances.”

Agencies recognize the difficulties that foster families are facing, and are working hard in finding solutions to help both the foster families and the children placed in the homes. “We are very concerned about our families who don’t have natural supports in place; who perhaps are struggling with substance abuse challenges, domestic violence, mental health issues; who are financially struggling,” said Boston Department of Children and Families employee Adriana Zwick. “There’s so many things that are coming together at this time that make it difficult.

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) has been actively working to help foster parents across the nation. According to Executive Director Irene Clements, the NFPA has been “adding links to resources as we get links appropriate for children and families, we are taking calls and making referrals when possible.”

Yet, many foster parents remain concerned, and confused, looking for answers and receiving little guidance. “No school, visits cancelled, church cancelled, and the children isolated from the friends they have made over the past 3 months,” said foster parent Jo Larson. “It isn’t anything physical, tangible, or able to be solved by throwing a dollar at it.”

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<https://medium.com/@drjoUdegarmo/coronavirus-and-foster-care-how-foster-families-and-child-welfare-are-struggling-during-the-1648a2d9d9a9>

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## COVID-19 AND AT-HOME LEARNING TEN TIPS FOR PARENTS NAVIGATING THE NEW REALITIES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

by Dr. Anonymous

With COVID-19 causing widespread school closures, children across the country are being given alternate resources, some online, to study outside of the classroom. Temporary solutions being devised for remote education range from online classroom tools like Google Classroom, to Zoom and podcasts by teachers. While parents are adjusting to this new scenario, during this time it’s also important to help kids stay focused on learning and avoid overuse of games, social media, and videos.

“This is a stressful, unpredictable time for everyone, including families, parents and children. You can help your children by providing them with a structure and routine, and being a positive force in their education,” says Dr. Pamela

Hurst-Della Pietra, President of Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development.

With that in mind, Children and Screens has put together ten tips for families as they adjust to the new reality of learning at home.

## 1. DIGITAL QUARANTINE

Consider limiting your children's cell phones and tablets until their schoolwork is done satisfactorily, so that it can receive their undivided attention. Apps, games, and messaging features are fun, but they can also prove distracting. It may not be an option for everybody, but ideally, try to give your kids a dedicated device such as a school laptop for maximum online learning.

## 2. MAKE SPACE FOR LEARNING

Your children will achieve their best work in a quiet, comfortable, and dedicated space devoted to learning. Ideally, this will be a different set-up than where they normally play games or watch television. Keep in mind that children will be in this space for many hours each day, and parents should watch out for any orthopedic issues that may arise related to comfort and posture.

## 3. MONITOR THE (COMPUTER) MONITOR

In this new learning milieu, you can help by monitoring your children's levels of interest and engagement in adapting to their new schedule and at-home materials. The simplest way to do this? Observation. Look at your child's eyes to see if they're following along with the screen. Check if they're taking notes or zoning out. Ask questions at the end of a lesson. While this may require taking an hour off from work or stepping out for an early lunch, it's important to confirm that your children are indeed learning. If you find that your child is not engaging with the lessons, don't be afraid to contact the school district or teachers to better explore the issue. Sometimes, easily remedied technical problems such as bad audio, poor connection, or an unhelpful camera angle can make all the difference.

## 4. DIGITAL RECESS

Make sure that your children take plenty of breaks in order to get physical activity and time away from screens. Set alarms similar to those they would encounter at school and encourage them to get up, get some fresh air, go for a walk or bike ride, or have a snack so that they are not sedentary for the entire day.

## 5. FACETIME

In-person interaction is ideal for kids, but until it's safe for them to return to school, encourage your children to video chat or text message rather than simply scrolling through social media. You don't want your children to feel socially isolated, but at the same time, you want to protect them from becoming wholly reliant upon their devices. Sit your children down for face-to-face conversations about screen time. In order to give them agency, discuss how much time they think is reasonable to spend online and make a "contract," committing to goals for on-screen vs. off-screen hours.

## 6. KEEP IT OLD SCHOOL

Overuse of screen time can have adverse impacts on young brains, so it's essential in these special circumstances to be extra careful when it comes to the littlest ones. As much as possible, parents should encourage print and book reading. If available,

request textbooks from your child's school along with other print materials in order to offset the amount of online learning they will be doing. Studies show that remote education can be challenging for all ages, but especially young kids, so do whatever you can and always err on the side of caution. Stimulate self-expression by having discussions with your children about what they are doing, and also encourage creative writing and imaginative story telling.

## 7. WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Remember that you're not alone in this journey. Check in with other parents to see what they've found effective or to ask if they need help. Share your concerns and useful hints. If you need contact information for other parents or resources, reach out to the PTA or your child's school. It is important that we all work together as a community for the good of our children and families.

## 8. PLAN YOUR WORK AND WORK YOUR PLAN

Good planning can relieve stress for both children and parents. Check in with your kids about their plans and help them develop a written schedule not only for the day, but for the week as a whole. Help them prioritize and learn to create goals, tasks, and deadlines, just like adults do when they go to work. Tasks that may not have been difficult for them while attending school in person can become more challenging when learning from home, so it's important to reinforce boundaries and offer incentives for healthy behaviors. To avoid disruption, some after-school activities may be offered via online video apps, Facetime, or Skype.

## 9. THIS AIN'T NO VACATION

Even though staying home from school might feel like a holiday, remind your kids that they're not on vacation. Assignments, grades, requirements, and tests like state exams, SATs, and ACTs aren't going away just because classes have moved online.

## 10. DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN

Plan off-screen activities for the whole family. Between school and work obligations, it's rare for parents and children to have this much time together, so turn it into an opportunity for bonding. Write predictions for a TV show that the whole family watches. Organize a tournament, family card games, charades, or chess, or get outside for a hike or walk together after school. Follow your community's guidelines about safe behavior and events, of course, but make sure you still find time for fun with your kids.

Without a doubt, this is a challenging time for parents, teachers, and children alike. Studies show that screen time can have both positive and adverse impacts on kids, and the shift to online education will only increase your child's time with their devices.

"Hopefully these common sense practices can help you and your family navigate this new terrain and make the most out of at-home learning," says Dr. Hurst-Della Pietra. You can write to me at [info@childrenandscreens.com](mailto:info@childrenandscreens.com) with any problems or suggestions that were not covered in this article."

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## JOIN NFAPA ....your support will enable NFAPA to continue supporting foster parents state-wide!

### Benefits

- Ongoing trainings/conferences at local and state level
- Networking opportunities with other foster families, adoptive families, and relative caregivers
- Opportunity for all foster families, adoptive families and relative caregivers to be actively involved in an association by serving on committees and/or on the Executive Board
- Working to instigate changes by alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system
- An advocate on your behalf at local, state and national levels
- 25% of membership dues goes toward an NFAPA Scholarship

### Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:  
NFAPA, 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D  
Lincoln, NE 68521.

**Questions? Please call us at 877-257-0176.**

NFAPA is a 501c3 non-profit organization comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors and Mentors.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a Foster/Adoptive Parent. I have fostered for \_\_\_\_\_ years.  
(circle one)

I am with \_\_\_\_\_ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
- Family Membership** (married foster or adoptive parents), \$35
- Supporting Membership** (individuals wishing to support our efforts), \$75
- Organization Membership** (organizations wishing to support our efforts), \$150
- Friends of NFAPA**, \$5 billed Monthly

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

- Gold Donation, \$1,000
- Silver Donation, \$750
- Platinum Donation, \$500
- Bronze Donation, \$250
- Other, \$ \_\_\_\_\_