

Challenges for parents during COVID-19

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Hi, my name is Lynn Borteck, I'm a licensed clinical social worker, and a licensed marriage and family therapist, and I'm here to present today's webinar which is challenges for parents during COVID-19. And we all know that parents who are home with their kids are in an unusual, very unusual situation these days during COVID. The kids don't have their regular schedules, parents are often trying to work from home and it's a really difficult situation, so I hope I'll be able to give you some helpful ideas today.

Parenting is always a challenge

Parenting is always a challenge, but COVID-19 has really changed everything for parents and kids. Lots of parents, as I said, are working or they're, at least they're trying to work from home, and schools, daycares, babysitting, all that kind of thing, all of our support systems are pretty much taken out from under us. We're not supposed to be near grandparents, neighbors, we're supposed to be social distancing which I hope all of you are. And so single parent and two parent households are both struggling to meet the challenges.

You've got a lot to handle

So you've got a lot on your plate, no question about it. Today's parents wear many hats. You could be a mom, a dad, a spouse, partner, single parent, employee, substitute teacher, referee, recreational director, playmate, and a person. That's a whole lot, those are a lot of different hats.

And I'm sure that, like most of us, you probably miss your everyday freedoms and just being able to go out and have a good time. In addition, you're the one who's supposed to help guide your kids through this very unsettling and disturbing time.

You may feel overwhelmed

So those are really really big challenges. It wouldn't surprise me if you feel overwhelmed. Many of us feel overwhelmed. You might feel frustrated and uncertain and lonely and angry and depressed and stressed out, and of course you're entitled to all of those feelings. As I said, you're human, and you're being tasked with something that's very very difficult.

So if you're having those feelings, understand that those are normal feelings, and then of course you have to figure out a way to channel those feelings and move on so that you can be a parent to your kids.

Tips to help you cope with parenting right now

Here are some tips to help you cope with parenting.

A note for all parents

Before we start, a quick note for every parent. The tips that I'm going to go over in this webinar are just that, they're just suggestions, they are not a list of shoulds. It's not what you should be doing, it's what you might do, what you can do, and it's, hopefully it'll get your own creative juices flowing and you'll be able to think of even more things. So it's a time that calls on parents to do what they can, using as much patience as they can, as much flexibility, and as much creativity as they can.

Tip #1: Try to stay calm

Tip number one is to try to stay calm. This kitten looks really chilled out, it'd be nice to be able to be that chilled out. Probably might be a little unrealistic, but please try to stay calm. Realize that nothing about what's going on now is normal. Nobody is at their best. And we don't even know what to look back on and say, oh yeah we did this at that time.

Everything is really different and we are all experiencing something that we are really not trained for. We don't quite know what to do. So give yourself and your family a break. There is no perfect in this situation, and P.S., perfect doesn't exist anyway. But I want to encourage you to especially be very realistic about how your family manages during these tough times.

Tip #2: Be ready for questions

Tip two is to be ready for questions, and remember that kids of different ages will have different questions for you. Now sometimes you won't know the answers to their questions, and that's okay, you don't have to be the, you know, you're not Google. You can tell them that you'll try to find out the answer. Other times kids are really asking a question when they need mostly reassurance, they need to know that, yes, this is scary, you know, very highly trained grownups are in charge, lots of doctors and researchers, and we're going to keep you safe. A lot of times little kids need to know that the grownups in their life are going to keep them safe.

Now if the child asks you a question and you're kind of uncertain about what they are really asking, ask them what they think the answer is. And here's why I'm saying that, because I recently had a friend tell me that her child got very upset and wound up asking a question, and the question was mommy, how are we going to see each other if we're in lockdown? And so my friend asked what her child thought lockdown was. Remember when, we've been talking a lot about being locked down, socially distanced, well this child focused on the word lockdown. And when mom said what do you think that is, she said I think it means we're all going to prison and we're all going to be locked up. And what am I going to do without you and who's going to take care of me? Well of course, you know it's not hard to imagine why lockdown might make a child think that. So when you're asked a question, or if you're, if your child seem particularly disturbed and you're talking about the situation, see what they think, or think they know, because they might be misinterpreting something as simple as that, and it can be terribly upsetting.

When you talk to your kids about COVID remember to stay age appropriate. You don't need to give graphic details to most children of most ages. Maybe teenagers may need to know or ask you for more numbers or status, statistics or something like that, but little kids don't know, and don't need to know about how many cases have been found and how many deaths and so forth. And also let your kids know that if they hear things they should ask you about them, because they may not be true.

Again, I want to reinforce staying calm, because your kids aren't only listening to you, they're watching you. They read a lot from your face and your body language.

Tip #3: Keep a routine

Number three, this tip is to try to keep to a routine. For both parents and kids it's really a great idea to get up and go to bed about the same time that you usually do, okay? This is really not the time to stay up till three in the morning, or sleep until noon, you know, maybe once in a while or something, but it is so much better for people to have a routine, and get up and brush your teeth and shower or bathe, and put on some clothes. They don't have to be fancy clothes or work clothes, your kids don't have to put on their school outfits, but it is good to get dressed into something.

Tip #4: Plan out each day

Tip number four is to make a plan for each day, and you can do this with a daily calendar. If you have a dry erase board it works really well, or you can do it on paper, and hang up the calendar where the whole family can see it. And you might want to mark off your work time, maybe you want to work from 9:30 to 11:30 or 12, and mark off your kids school work time. And tip, try to make

number one and two be around the same time. Also though, work in some break times so that, you know, every hour or so you take a break, you stretch, you walk around, if it's nice out you take a little walk with your child.

Also don't forget that there's time for recess during everybody's day these days. Great idea to play a game with your child, if your child is old enough, maybe get your child involved in something other than their school work and you both do something but do it nearby but separately. Or if they're too little for that, do something together, play a game, if it's nice out, go outside.

And don't worry, your calendar doesn't have to work out exactly right each day, it's not a commitment it's a suggestion, but the idea is to have some structure.

And it's also really great to have a special surprise at the end of each day if you can. These don't have to be big surprises, it can be, you know, like, oh I don't know a piece of candy or some extra time that you'll read a story to your children or something like that. Something that's really going to be a great fun surprise at the end of the day. It doesn't have to be everyday, it can be some days.

Tip #5: Use some time for fun and projects

Tip five is that this is a wonderful opportunity to get some projects done around the house, and they can be fun and functional. So you can do things like here we see a mom and a daughter washing the car. That's great! It's fun, it does something, there's a lot of other projects you can have kids clean out their rooms or clean out their closet or their play bin or something like that.

And be generous in terms of considering a reward system, because that works. People like to be rewarded for things, and maybe you can think up a point system or something like that, or if your child likes to save up for things that they then buy, you know, you can give them a quarter for each of the tasks that they do, or whatever you judge to be appropriate.

Tip #6: Give kids time to play by themselves

Number six is to give kids time to play by themselves. You know, there still needs to be limits and boundaries, and you're not the rec director, you're not the entertainment committee because your kids are home. Of course you're going to be interacting more, and also your kids are going to be, probably a little blue and bored because they don't have their regular activities and their friends, but you can expect kids of a certain age to play alone for different periods of time, and you probably know with your own child how long they can do that. So, that's okay, and also I want to remind you that everything doesn't have to be hunky dory if your child is being particularly disturbing to you or,

you know, really pushing your buttons, it's still okay to give a time out during this period of time. Again, consider that rewards system so that, when they do play on their own, you can reward them.

Tip #7: Give yourself time, too

Also, tip number seven, is to try to take some time for yourself. If you have a partner you can take turns and this can be done fairly easily. One partner can watch the kids while the other partner takes a half hour break or an hour break and does something just for them to get themselves re-energized.

If you're a single parent, it might be a little bit more of a, of a struggle and a juggle to get this done, but if you have other friends with kids, you might set up something where there's virtual time where one person, and you can get everybody on one of the, you know, Zoom platform or some other platform where you are video, video enabled and audio enabled. One adult may read a book or play a game online with several kids, and that gives those parents a little bit of time off. And then you can switch.

If your kids are old enough, let them stay on their own for a little while while you do something for you. And if your kids aren't old enough to be alone, try to set them up with a game or a toy while you take a little bit of a time out for yourself, but of course you need to be nearby. So those are three ideas if you are a single parent.

Tip #8: Rest

Tip number eight, don't forget that rest is an important part of each day, because we all need time to reboot, and everyone, children and adults, are at their best when they have enough rest and enough sleep. And look at, in this picture, how perfect that is, just that wonderful moment where two people are getting a nap at the same time. Of course it's not always possible, but what a miraculous moment, maybe you'll get some of those too.

Tip #9: Remember grown up time

Tip number nine is to remember to take time for grownups, and it's really, you'll really be better able to be a parent if you carve out some time for your other relationships. You do need to reconnect with other adults on a regular basis, you know, if you are a married couple, maybe after the kids go to bed you can have a dinner date or a little dance party or just some time to yourselves.

If you're a single parent, you could use social and video platforms to meet online with other parents, or just take time to make phone calls to friends and family. Stay connected. Definitely stay

connected, it will give you so much more, it'll boost your energy for parenting, which is, take a lot of energy right now.

Tip #10: You can do it

You can do it, that's tip number ten. No doubt this is a big challenge for all of us, but you can also see it as an opportunity. It's an opportunity to get closer with your family, it's a, it's really an opportunity to not be tormented all the time, as you might be when you're, when everything is normal, where you're rushing around, you come home from work, you don't have enough time with your kids. Even if you're working from home, you can carve out some time for your kids, and you may find that you, you draw closer together.

Do remember that you, as the adults, set the tone in your household, so if you're frazzled every single day, your kids are going to react to that frazzled, frazzled-ness. And if you need more help, and you might, you might need a counselor to talk to or a therapist, you can contact your EAP, you can call your insurance provider to find out about counselors, or you can look online for other options. A lot of counselors these days are doing tele-video counseling, and it's really another wonderful way to get support so that you can do this parenting during this difficult time.

You can do this. Good luck and thank you for attending.

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