



## **COVID-19 CRISIS COPING FOR CHILDREN, ALLIES, ADVOCATES, AND CAREGIVERS**

Pandemic Stress and Restrictions – An Opportunity for Child and Family Growth

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The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to think creatively, broaden our perspective, balance our needs and wants with the needs and wants of family members, and prioritize community needs over the wants of the individual. No matter our age, we all have the capacity to rewire our brains, through action, to effectively address challenges. To physically and psychologically survive, we must adapt. This global crisis is teaching children by way of direct experience. They are watching us value and protect the more vulnerable by way of small sacrifice offered by the less vulnerable. Together, we are anxious - together we must manage. And we will.

Children and adolescents need us to model healthy compartmentalization toward things that cannot be controlled or predicted; to live the principles of staying present and essentialism (essential practices for all members of society); to postpone certain kinds of gratification by pausing awhile; to practice empathy and kindness; to practice self-care; and, to be a wise and discriminating consumer of news before creating an action plan.

This is an uncertain and even frightening time. For too many kids and families already coping with trauma, illness, or chronically stressful family lives, the 2020 pandemic adds an additional burden on an already burdened family system. But as I listened to stories over the past few weeks as a trauma-informed child and family therapist, I was also struck by the amount of opportunities we have as adults to teach, practice and model lifestyle choices and personality and character traits that are critical to healthy and successful brain and body development.

Children's brains are waiting for adults to lead the way and prove we can stay healthy, be flexible, postpone gratification, adapt, and achieve goals even in times of tremendous stress, fear, and uncertainty. When advocates, allies and caregivers of children patiently lead the way, we gift children a template for maintaining a life- and work-ethic in times of unpredictability and adversity that will last a lifetime. For it's the ways we show that will determine the ways they grow.

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## COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS RESPONSE

### Restrictions as Opportunities to Practice Citizenship, Build Character and Strengthen Resilience

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- Perspective-taking is required to hear and appreciate each other's experience in order to problem-solve and reduce tension in ourselves and within our homes.
- 'Being with' children's thoughts, feelings, fears, perceptions, and needs without teaching or correcting cultivates psychological health and promotes parent-child relationship.
- A calm, nurturing and playful parent sends an "I got this" message to children (my home is safe and secure even when the world is not).
- Frequent adaptation and problem solving is required to maintain health and growth (i.e., self-study while a parent needs to work).
- New coping skills and stress reduction strategies are introduced and practiced because there is no choice but to adjust.
- Daily planning, organization and creating balance and routine (work-play-body-health-family-friends) are required to protect hope, find joy, and maintain family functioning.
- Within this frightening chapter of our lives there lies tremendous opportunity to potentiate those characteristics widely recognized as essential to physical and psychological health...already and always available to children and adults alike, including:

- ✓ Relationship & Social Connection
- ✓ Practical & Emotional Communication
- ✓ Work-Play-Life Balance
- ✓ Flexibility
- ✓ Innovation & Creativity
- ✓ Frustration Tolerance
- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Self-Care
- ✓ Other-Care
- ✓ Self-Service
- ✓ Other-Service
- ✓ Compassion (Self- and Other)
- ✓ Community Collaboration
- ✓ News Source Verification & Critical Thinking (Fact? Entertainment? Motivated Reasoning?)

