



# Help for Parents and Caregivers During the Time of the Coronavirus

Information from the Global Child-EMDR Alliance



The coronavirus has caused great distress for parents and children around the globe.

## First things first: Healthy self-care for parents

You are the center of your children's world. It is vital that you take care of yourself first. Following are healthy self-care suggestions for YOU!

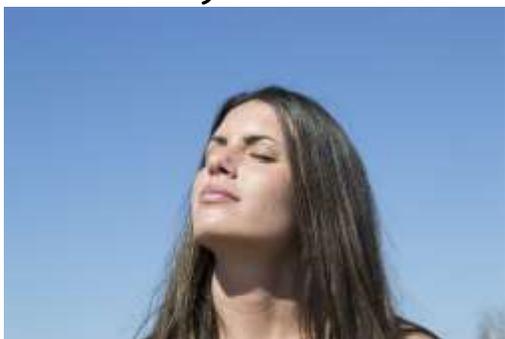
- EMDR "Butterfly Hug" can create feelings of calm in the middle of your stressful day:

1. Find a quiet spot and picture a place of respite in your mind's eye; somewhere that would be very calm and peaceful.
2. Close your eyes and imagine yourself there.
3. Notice what you can see, what you can touch, what you can hear.



4. Cross your arms over your chest and make 5 to 7 slow, alternating taps on your shoulders while thinking of what you can see, hear, and touch there. Observe as your body releases tension.

- **Stay connected to friends and family:** Call or text them regularly. Be open and honest about what you're experiencing.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Observe your emotions. Observe your thoughts. Observe your physical sensations. Don't judge any of it. Let it be...
- **Self-expression:** Express yourself through art, music, or journaling.
- **Practice Yoga, Tai Chi, or some other form of exercise.**



- **Meditate:** Make time and space to sit, focus on a spot or close your eyes. Breathe deeply in, hold, slowly exhale, and pause. Continue this breathing, focusing on the sensation of your breath as you inhale and exhale. Imagine sweeping your thoughts into a box.

- Take a walk by yourself.
- Pray.
- Make a snack that you like to eat and don't share it with anyone.
- Take a bath.
- Listen to a podcast.

- Read the book that you have been wanting to read...even if it is for 5 minutes.
- Self-compassion exercise:
  1. Place your hand over your heart.
  2. Name your feeling.
  3. Remind yourself that you are not alone.
  4. Say a prayer to your personal Higher Power/universe: "May I... (find peace/find acceptance/be well)."
  5. Cross your arms and apply the "butterfly hug" to deepen positive feelings.

Observe your child/adolescent for changes in behavior.

Children typically do not recognize or verbalize their distress. Their fear, anxiety, sadness, and worry can look like:

- Fear of separating from parent(s) at bedtime, disturbed sleep
- Clingy behaviors, whining, or tearfulness
- Moodiness and irritability
- Oppositional behaviors
- Anger episodes and major meltdowns over small things
- Sore tummy and headaches
- Being quieter than usual
- Appearing more alert than usual
- They may act out events that bother them in their play and stories.



Children and adolescents struggle with...

Loss of...

- Contact with teachers, classmates, and friends.
- Prom, graduation, or other school events.
- Safety of normal life.

- Contact with grandparents and other family or extended family members.
- (Sadly, some children have even lost someone to the virus.)

## My child's behaviors are becoming very difficult. What can I do?

- **Connect:** Your children feel better when they feel a sense of connection with you. Use this time of social distancing to give your children a sense of connection through shared meals, games, and conversations.
- **Find gentle ways to redirect and manage behaviors.**

1. Dan Siegel says, "Connect, then redirect." For example, give a hug to a girl who won't share, and then say, "You are a good girl, please give your brother a turn, now."



2. **Offer compromises:** For example, "Let's compromise. How about do half of the schoolwork now and half after dinner."
3. **Ask for a re-do:** For example, "That's not okay behavior. Let's have a re-do. Please repeat with polite words."
4. **Minimal consequences**

## Calming and connecting activities for young children

- **EMDR "Butterfly Hug":** With a younger child sitting on your lap, cross your hands over your child's chest and alternate taps on his shoulders with your hands while singing a loving song such as "I love you, you love me, we're a loving family..."
- **Blowing bubbles:** Blowing slowly on the wand, watching the bubbles grow, and watching the bubbles float away is like a calming meditation for you and your children.



- **Imaginary Soup:** Pretend to hold a bowl of soup in your hands. Pretend to smell the soup by taking in a big, long breath through the nose. Pretend to blow on the soup for a long exhale.
- **Legs Up the Wall Pose:** This yoga pose is easy for parents and children alike. It calms the mind as well as the body. Lie with your back on the floor and prop your legs up against the wall, straight up if you can, but adjusting for comfort. **BREATHE** and relax for two to five minutes.
- **Playdough:** There's nothing like squishing playdough with your hands to calm the nervous system!
- **Hand-clapping game:** With an older child, face each other and play a hand-clapping game. Clap his right hand with your left hand and then his left hand with your right hand, back and forth in a steady rhythm. Get creative and add additional cross claps and knee claps. Sing a positive, fun song along with the rhythm such as "Let it Go."
- **Sensory help:** Many children have sensory needs. They calm down when they are provided with activities that push their muscles or provide pressure. For example:

1. Jumping rope, dancing, or jumping on a trampoline.
2. Try filling socks with rice or lentils and tying them around ankles or wrists for a helpful heavy sensation.
3. Set up an obstacle course in the house or yard to provide them an opportunity to crawl and climb!
4. Get down on the floor and do stretches and exercises together.



- **Shared chores:** Involve your children and adolescents in everyday activities with you such as cooking or folding laundry. Chat, tell jokes, and make it fun!
- **Create a special handshake:** Make a handshake together, taking turns to add new gestures or movements. For example: Adult-high five; child-hand clap; adult-wiggly fingers; child-elbows touch...and so on. it can be done with the

whole family. Just make sure that everyone takes their turn. (Can use this when saying good morning and good night.)

- **Blanket tent:** Make a "tent" with chairs and blanket, a cozy and small place. Read together or do other nurturing activities under the blanket.
- **Follow the leader:** Everyone stands together in a circle and everyone takes turns being the leader. The leader chooses a particular way to move, with or without sound. The others copy. (Just one rule: nothing that would hurt or embarrass anyone.)
- **Manicure/pedicure (Especially great for adolescents):** Use warm water to soak the child's feet/hands and have a nice feet/hand bath. Then use lotion to massage feet/hands. You can use real or imaginary nail polish. (Be gentle when cleaning or cutting nails, hands and feet.)

### Calming and connecting activities for adolescents

- Watch a show that they like to watch
- Learn how to play a video game
- Go for a walk
- Listen...no advice-giving
- Cook

### Attune to your children's feelings...

Make space and time for children to express their feelings:

- VALIDATE their feelings.
- NORMALIZE their feelings.
- Show EMPATHY for their feelings.
- Encourage your children to cry.
- It IS okay to cry with your children. Crying with your children can be healthy when they see that you can cry AND you are okay.

- Say, "All your feelings are normal. You can have these feelings and still be okay. Your feelings will come and go. It's good for you to have a good cry. I'm here for you."

## When school is home and home is school...

- Your children may struggle when they only have you to assist them with schoolwork. They miss their teachers, friends, and the school day.



- Validate your children's sadness about this change.
- Help them with their studies but keep a healthy perspective about the schoolwork. Your connection is more important than their academic success

during this difficult time.

- Allow your children and adolescents some choices when it comes to their studies. Allow them to choose topics or choose where to study.
- Relax some of the rules regarding social media so they can connect with friends. This is especially important for adolescents.
- Keep firm rules about putting screens and games away when it's time to sleep or study.



## Talking to your children about the coronavirus

- Limit your children's exposure to the news. Monitor what they view on screens of any kind.
- Be interested in what they know and what they want to know. Let their questions lead you.



### Make space to talk. Say...

- "Coronavirus is a sickness that spreads fast. Some people get a little sick and some people get very sick. But smart people all around the world are talking to each other and working together on ways to solve this problem."
- "When many people work together, their determination is like a superpower. But we must be patient, because it will take time."
- "Our family is strong, and together we will get through this."
- "Moms and dads and teachers and other adults are working together to keep all kids healthy and safe."
- "You are not alone. We love you so much."
- "Our world has gone through similar times before, and many people worked hard until they found solutions." (Such as Polio and other diseases.)



## Children and adolescents who have a traumatic past

- Are the most vulnerable to stress and anxiety.
- Have more difficulty trusting adults to take care of them.
- May carry negative beliefs from early in life such as "I'm not safe." "I must protect myself." "It's my fault." "I'm trapped." "I'm alone."
- These negative beliefs will be triggered and escalate their struggles.

Children with a trauma past need a lot of reassurance.

Say to your children,

- "We are going to do everything we can to keep you safe.
- We will always make sure you have what you need.
- This is hard, but there will be an end to it."

**If your child or adolescent is currently in therapy, continue!**

- If your child or adolescent has a current therapist, it would be advisable to have them continue in therapy.
- Therapists across the globe have ways to connect with their clients via phone, skype, zoom or whatever is available.
- If your therapist has not reached out to you, reach out to them!
- Sessions will look and sound different, but can be a valuable support as your family adjusts to this new way of life for a while.

**If you have a child who is not currently in therapy, it is OK to reach out and start!**

- If you or your children feel overwhelmed with sadness, anxiety, frustration, or difficult behaviors and you are concerned and would like support, don't hesitate to seek assistance from a mental health professional for you and for your children.
- Many professionals provide help through the internet or phone.
- A specialized trauma therapy called EMDR therapy involves bilateral eye movements and can help children and parents with hard times.
- Find a therapist in your community that provides the help you need.



We can empower a generation of young people with resources for resilience and connection with others that will help them through challenging events now and in the future.

## Global Child-EMDR



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