

## Has COVID-19 caused home life to be harder?

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As a defining moment in history, the COVID-19 pandemic will be remembered by adults and imprinted on the children who are experiencing.

For children, this pandemic might be a frightening time that will stay with them into adulthood, but careful response by their caregivers could instead lead to strength building, formulation of healthy habits and the creation of positive family memories.

"I am very concerned that parents and kids may be isolated at home, in need of help and unsure how to get safe. It is more important than ever to proactively reach out for help, whether for yourself or for someone else," says [Dr. Emily Siffermann](#), a child abuse pediatrician with Advocate Children's Medical Group, "People need to reach out to family members and neighbors to provide general support and when there is a concern about safety people need to know who to call for help."

This pandemic can lead to increased anxiety and stress for both children and their caregivers, which in turn increases risk for interpersonal violence, including domestic violence and both physical and emotional child abuse. Examples of possible stressors include:

- Financial strain
- Housing and food insecurity
- Normal routine disruption
- School closures and parents having to help with learning at home
- Inadequate childcare or reliance on unfamiliar caregivers
- Isolation at home in close quarters
- Anxiety about illness
- [Death of a loved one and disrupted grieving process](#)
- Possible increased exposure to adults with undertreated mental health problems or substance use disorders.
- Possible close and prolonged contact with an abusive person

"It is normal to be frustrated as a parent at times, even without the increased demands on our parenting skills due to the pandemic and stay-at-home orders," Dr. Siffermann says. "We need to respond with a renewed effort to take care of ourselves and respond to our children with positive parenting strategies. We have an opportunity to build resilience in our children by modeling self-care and positivity whenever possible during this challenging time."

Dr. Siffermann shares nine positive parenting tips that can help navigate this pandemic and save yourself and family from a melt-down or worse.

- **Get help for your family's basic needs:** Now is not the time to be prideful or isolated. There are many state, community, faith-based, health care and non-profit organizations helping families in need with job loss, food needs, medical assistance etc. Don't hesitate to reach out to get help sooner than later and make sure to keep scheduled appointments that would help in these areas like your children's well childcare appointments, even if they have been changed to a virtual online platform.
- **Create a flexible structure to each day:** Make sure you are keeping healthy at home by creating a loose routine for you and your family, including regular mealtimes, time to exercise and play and a time to sleep. Include time outdoors whenever possible.
- **Be kind to yourself:** There is a lot to digest during this pandemic and what will be next. Yoga, meditation, journaling, reading, walking/hiking, creating arts and crafts and playing music are all potential ways to decompress and recharge. Taking care of yourself helps sustain your ability to care for others while being calm and flexible, plus, models the healthy habit of self care to the children around you.
- **Foster open communication:** Ask and listen to how your child is feeling. Inform yourself with credible outlets whether the CDC, your state's department of public health or your health system's information center. Share age appropriate information honestly with your kids. Acknowledge their feelings and any uncertainty. Have them identify some things they have liked or have gone well since the stay at home directive. Involve them when planning activities and the household routine.
- **Keep kids busy:** Create positive experiences and behavior by having plenty of things to do. Some ideas including hosting game or movie nights; creating a family recipe; reading the same book; visiting online museums; and drawing and coloring. Involve kids in reaching out to loved ones.
- **Be positive:** Let your child know their strengths and that they matter. Notice their positive behaviors and point it out to them with a lot of praise. Point out that there are many people helping in our community and share hope and what good can come out of this time.
- **Reach out to family members and neighbors:** Along with your immediate family make sure you and your child can stay connected with their school friends, neighbors and clubs, whether via phone, video or online games.
- **Create a safe environment:** Plan to have someone watch the kids when you take a break, work or are away. With kids having increased time at home there is a higher chance of household injuries. Now is a good time to look around the house from your child's point of view and child proof potential hazards and cleaning products.
- **Ask for help for yourself or someone you know:** It is OK to seek help when you don't have answers, are not feeling yourself, or are concerned with the safety of yourself, children, or others. Turn to a primary medical care provider or mental health provider if you don't know who to talk to. If you notice someone in trouble, contact a professional. View list down below.

Anyone worried about the possibility of child abuse or neglect can contact any of the below state or national hotlines:

- **Illinois Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-25-ABUSE or 1-800-252-2873
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233 or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)
- **Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-877-863-6338
- **National Suicide prevention hotline:** 1-800-273-8255 or [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) Crisis counselors answer calls 24/7 and provide crisis intervention, information, and referrals.