

Keeping Your Cool During Coronavirus Quarantine

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We love our kids, but let's face it, parenting is stressful enough without being stuck inside with antsy children due to the coronavirus pandemic. No more attending school. Forget about movie theaters. And skip other public places where you'd normally go. Social distancing is the new normal, and that means no playdates either.

EEK! How will I keep my family sane and maintain peace inside the house?

With this additional pressure, it's understandable that you'll lose it more often with your children. Who wouldn't? During this difficult time, our patience will be pushed to the limits. But yelling is ineffective and raises everyone's stress levels. Instead, create games to deal with everyday challenges and turn frustrating power struggles into family fun. As a result, toddlers, school-age children and teenagers will listen and cooperate – willingly. Kids love to play, so when you're playful, you work with your children rather than against them.

It might seem counterintuitive to talk about playful parenting during this COVID-19 crisis. However, this technique is effective in many ways. Not only will parenting be easier, but you'll also lower everyone's stress level, which is essential during a crisis time.

Sounds good in theory, but how do you learn to employ playful parenting approaches? Below are suggestions for typical issues specific to this coronavirus emergency. I've adapted ideas from my easy to read, entertaining book, [Parenting—Let's Make a Game of It](#).

How do I get my kids to work from home, like it's a school day?

Routines! Children need structure, so it's important to set up a school-like schedule. First, designate a section of your

house for learning. If you don't have a separate room, you can simply transform your kitchen table. Give everyone a box and fill it with supplies dependent on their age (laptop computer, books, notebooks, paper, pens, crayons, etc.). Get ready, set, learn!

Second, continue as usual where everyone gets up and puts on clothes as if they were going to school. No pajamas! You want your kids to be in school-mode rather than lounging-around-let's-watch-TV mode. To set the tone, you can ring a bell or play a song while everyone marches to the learning area. "Hear ye, hear ye, school is now in session!" Just like in school, there should be no phones, TV or any other distractions.

Next, build a schedule with your kids to mimic a typical day. Include time for study and learning, PE, lunch, snacks and naptime for the little ones. The structure sets expectations and breaks the long day into manageable chunks. You can also empower older kids by having them help younger ones and lead group projects. Take advantage of their busy times to focus on your own work.

Lastly, set the routine in action but anticipate roadblocks. These hiccups can provide wonderful team-building opportunities to improve your plan together as a family. And don't forget to have fun with this at-home school arrangement. Assign who chooses the wake-up song, who

leads the exercise break between study time slots, who decides on the PE activity and who ends the school day in a funny way.

How am I going to get everything done in the house?

There's a silver lining to having your kids home: they can help with chores! This will not only keep them busy, but also it teaches life skills. The best way to motivate kids is when they're involved in the decision-making process, so have them help create the chore list. If you have little ones, include pictures so they too can "read" it.

Now comes the fun part, turning chores into a game! The secret is incorporating your children's passions, like listening to music, singing and dancing. How can I playfully get my kids to do a task? For instance, toddlers can wiggle and dance while they clean a room, young children can pretend to be their favorite superheroes, and older kids can race against the clock to music. Want more buy-in?

Brainstorm other playful ideas with your kids. If you need an additional incentive, reward with stars and keep a star chart. These can be exchanged for fun group activities like baking cookies, choosing the family movie or whatever your child enjoys.

How can I help my children manage their stress?

This is a good opportunity to teach deep-breathing exercises, something that will help your children throughout their lives. A useful technique is the Secret Magical Breath, a simplified meditation practice for children. Have your children sit or lie down with their hands on their stomach. Instruct them to watch their hands go up and down with each breath. To make it easier for young kids, place their favorite stuffed animal on their belly. I recommend including meditation time into their daily routine.

We're not used to being together in a closed space. How can I keep the peace when we get on each other's nerves?

Guess what? You WILL get on each other's nerves! Plan for it because conflict will definitely happen. It's time for the Parent's Court! Gather your kids in the living room where you're the judge and each person gets a chance to speak. Hash out the issues until you have a resolution. You can lighten the mood with sock puppets, stuffed animals or a special hat people wear when speaking. Whatever your approach, you're teaching them conflict resolution skills.

This COVID-19 pandemic is transforming our society and family lives overnight, and it will take a while to adapt. These playful approaches will improve difficult situations and help everyone in your family stay calm and sane. Here's to incorporating more skills and developing a cohesive family!

Karen Thurm Safran is a Bay Area mom and K-12 Education Technology consultant. Her book, Parenting — Let's Make a Game of It, shows playful ways to stop struggling with your children. Written for busy parents, this creative approach is shared through amusing short stories with an encouraging down-to-earth tone. Learn more at ParentingLetsMakeAGameOfIt.com.