



HELP YOUR CHILD COPE DURING THE PANDEMIC WITH THE COVID TOOLBOX

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By: Dr. Dina Kulik

The pandemic has proven to be stressful and anxiety-provoking for adults as well as children. The new norm of masking and keeping a distance from friends and other loved ones can be challenging for young people to understand, but it is essential to keep them healthy.

Here are my favorite strategies for:

1. PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING

3. HAND HYGIENE

4. VIRTUAL LEARNING



1. PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

Here are some strategies to help your child cope with restrictions posed by the virus.

1. Encourage your child to ask questions instead of you always directing the questioning.
2. Listen more than speaking
3. Reassure your child that they are safe.
4. Understand what they are going through. Your child may have difficulty sleeping or eating or maybe moodier. Your child may need extra TLC from you.
5. Kids look to parents to feel safe and secure. Let your child know you are a team and will work together to get through this time.
6. Stick to a routine. Kids and adults like routine and predictability. As much as possible, stick to your typical sleep and mealtime routine. Even if your children learn from home, wake at your usual times, perform everyday hygiene habits, and eat as usual. Avoid snacking all day and focus on three healthy meals per day.
7. Encourage your child to remain social, even from a distance. Have virtual playdates or distanced ones with a mask. Your child will feel less isolated and lonely if they can 'see' their friends.

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2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Social (or physical distancing) can feel difficult for children who are used to being near friends and family. It can prove very challenging to maintain distance.

It is important to emphasize that physical distance is not emotional distance, and children should be encouraged to connect with their loved ones. It is also a great time to connect to those in your household and form even stronger bonds than before.

Here are some tips to decrease feelings of isolation or sadness while we maintain distance:

1. Use technology to connect with friends and family. Set a date for a playdate, so your child has an opportunity to get excited about it.
2. Try a new hobby. Even better – start a new hobby with your child. I started playing guitar with my eldest over the pandemic, and it is so much fun!
3. Learn a new skill such as baking, computer programming, or cooking. Activities that can be done as a family or in friendly competition is fun as well.
4. Spend quality time together, making new memories. Play a board game, watch a movie or do a puzzle together.
5. Spend time outside as a family. The fresh air and physical activity will do wonders for your body and mind. Getting your heart rate up will help you all feel healthier and more energetic.
6. Start a book together. We are reading (and in some cases) re-reading Harry Potter as a family each day. The younger kids love reading with their older brothers and me. It is a lovely bonding time.
7. Start having your children help with chores. My kids now help wash and put away dishes, food preparation, make their beds, and tidy their rooms each day. Everyone in the family needs to pitch in to keep the home clean and organized. My kids love knowing they are contributing positively to the order of the house.

3. GOOD HAND HYGIENE

How do I encourage my children to practice good hand hygiene?

We know that practicing diligent hand hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent illness. Young children and babies often put their hands in their mouths, so keeping them clean can go a long way to avoid viruses and bacterial infections.

Here are some tips to ensure your child's hands are clean:

1. Ensure your child washes their hands for at least 20 seconds. Singing 'Happy Birthday' twice does the trick
2. Encourage your child to wash their hands at particular times, as a habit.
 - a. After using the washroom
 - b. Before and after eating
 - c. Before and after preparing meals
 - d. After sneezing or coughing into their hands/tissue
 - e. After touching another child.
 - f. After touching another child's toys.
 - g. When the hands look visibly soiled.
 - h. After touching animals

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Hand Hygiene continued;

When should I use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

If you do not have access to running water and soap, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to decrease germs spread.

Kids should use a dime-size amount in their palm and then rub their hands together. Encourage your child to rub the back of the hands and around each finger and thumb.

Do not forget to have sanitizer touch the fingertips. Allow the sanitizer to dry. I tell children to imagine that the sanitizer is paint. You want to ensure the 'paint' covers every surface of the skin. You can even practice with some finger paint. It can be challenging to cover all the surfaces, and the visualization can be helpful.

How do I teach my child to wash their hands properly?

Follow these simple steps:

1. Make the hands wet with running water
2. Apply soap to the hands
3. Lather and rub all surfaces of the hands well for at least 15 seconds. Singing 'Happy Birthday' twice does the trick.
4. Rinse the hands well with running water.
5. Pat the hands dry with a clean and dry towel. Alternatively, you can air dry.
6. Turn off the tap with the towel or your sleeve without touching with your bare hands.

What should I remind my kids to keep safe?

1. Tell your children to cover coughs and sneezes with their upper arm or a tissue, and not use the hand. Discard the tissue right away and wash or sanitize the hands before doing anything else.
2. Avoid touching your face, particularly the eyes, nose, and mouth. Imagine there are sparkles all over your hands, and these can quickly transfer to other surfaces. This is like germs!
3. Your children should stay home when sick, and model this behavior for your kids as well.

3. VIRTUAL LEARNING

Learning from home is a unique complication of the pandemic. Most parents are not formally trained educators, and there are certainly challenges associated with learning from home. As parents, it is beneficial to instill some normalcy and stability during this time. Routine helps children feel safe and secure.

Here are some tips to ensure virtual learning success:

1. Connect with your child's teacher or school and stay in touch throughout this home learning period.
2. Review what is required of your child and what equipment they may need.

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Virtual Learning continued;

3. Ensure your child knows how to turn on their device and connect to the virtual learning platform.
4. Review assignments with your child and plan with your child about when they will complete the work.
5. Create a daily schedule, so your child and you know what to expect. Children love routine and predictability.
6. Connect with the teacher should you face any challenges. Your child may have some connectivity issues or difficulty with some work. Letting the teacher know can prevent further delays and stress.
7. Keep the usual routines for sleep and mealtimes. Avoid snacking all day, and instead focus on three healthy meals a day, as was the case during in-person school.
8. Structure the day for school time, snack and meal times, rest time, and physical activity. Getting outside each day for some exercise will make your child feel less isolated and more energetic.
9. Be flexible and adapt the schedule based on your child's needs.
10. Remind your child of your expectations and ask them what they love and what they are not enjoying. Remain flexible about the schedule to ensure school work is complete, but your child remains happy and confident.
11. Encourage your child to remain connected with their friends and loved ones, even when not in school. Organizing virtual playdates or distanced meetups (while masked and maintaining 6 feet of distance) can help your child feel more connected and less isolated.
12. Try to make learning fun by incorporating puzzles, drawings, painting, and building exercises. Kids love to learn by touching and creating.
13. Encourage your child to journal or draw their experiences so you can both reflect on their feelings.

#YouGotThis



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