

Tips on Parenting During the Coronavirus

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I write this on a glorious Spring Monday morning. Inside, I am stuck at my desk, and my three adult daughters are all working in different parts of the house. None of us have chosen this. We are here because of the coronavirus sweeping the world.

We are in unprecedented times. All of us. A teenager said; "Mum, what did you do last time this happened? you know, swine flu wasn't it?" "No darling," her mother replied, "This has never happened before in my life time."

Parents have to adapt to several new roles. We are now a few weeks into lockdown. Families all under one roof, trying to work, study, play, survive, and manage all the daily needs of home, work and family. I have spent many hours on Zoom or Facetime, talking to parents, speaking on webinars and keeping up with family and friends I haven't seen in person for weeks.

Themes are emerging about what helps parents, and what makes it more challenging, so I have combined my professional training with current experience to bring you my top five tips for being a parent right now.

1. DEALING WITH ANXIETY and other hard feelings

Your children maybe fine one minute, anxious, moody, upset the next. Your job is to help them stay calm, and to listen. Don't worry too much about their schooling. For now, eating well, good sleep, and being outside for the allotted hour is essential. And listen with kindness and empathy, not fixing. Find someone to listen to you, not your children, or keep a journal of your fears, but also what's positive about this time together.

2. **LOWER THE BAR**

We are in unprecedented times, so it maybe wise to relax the rules on screen time and social networking. Keeping in touch is vital, for all of us, with friends and family. The house could be more of a mess than you would like. Make sure everyone is on board with family contributions (better word than 'chores'). More than anything, your children need your love and support, not bootcamp!

3. **TOO MUCH INFORMATION**

"Will granny die?" asked a child. Worries about coronavirus, school issues, friendship concerns are future things, not with us now. Ask them what they know about the coronavirus, and how they know? What are they hearing and seeing? Recommend trusted news sources, such as the NHS, BBC, and Public Health England. Watch for rumours or scaremongering. Be mindful of how much you are watching the news, being negative, allowing your feelings to take over. Be honest about how you feel, but take steps to stay calm yourself.

4. **COMMUNICATION**

Family meetings are essential, but manage them constructively using my 'Triple Cs'.

C- CHECK-IN, ask how everyone is doing first. How do they feel about things? Just listen to the good, the bad and the ugly

C – for CREATE – come up with ideas to make life better – get creative with ideas, and no ridiculing of suggestions

C – for CONFIRM – what you decide to do

Review – meet regularly and listen to who needs what from the week ahead.

5. **PLAY**

Your children are used to playtime at school. It is an essential part of their day, just as valuable as their maths lesson. When they are on a break, don't interrupt or assume they are 'wasting' time.

Agree how long breaks are, and make sure some time each day is off screens. Parents need breaks too. Plan in some uninterrupted time for you to recharge. Getting outside, while we can, is the best

way to improve our mental and physical health. And staying connected to your friends and family. Lastly, make it everyone's responsibility to bring some fun into the house! We dress up for dinner every Friday and play cards.

A silver lining in all this could be that in some small way, you can see this time of being with your family as a gift, when under normal circumstances, we're so often complaining we never have enough time.

I hope these tips help, and please contact me at www.parentingpeople.co.uk for any coaching or support. I am offering free coaching to anyone working in the NHS or caring services.