

Solutions to Save Your Sanity during the Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus has forced us into navigating how to: stay connected during isolation and “social distancing”; as well as, provide an education to students in our district. This could drive you crazy, OR you could view this as a gift, a rare opportunity to cultivate family connection and create habits that will help your family thrive long after this pandemic is over. Following you will find some solutions to help you save your sanity during the coronavirus pandemic.

Get everyone in your family moving and laughing.

It's well established that children need lots of physical movement in their days or they have a harder time self-regulating. But the truth is, so do adults. And laughter changes the body chemistry, reducing stress hormones and increasing bonding hormones. As a result, physical activity and laughter are the best stress-busters for all age groups.

Schedule family physical activity every day.

Have dance parties, go on nature walks or create an obstacle course. Or find a fun routine online - a dance class, exercise class or yoga video - and learn a protocol that you all enjoy. Then turn off the screen and rotate which family member leads each day.

Get Outside.

Nature is a natural stress antidote and fresh air will help your whole family feel better and sleep better. I know, you're supposed to stay home. But if you stay away from other people, you can go to the park while "social distancing." Set your kids up in a human train, with their hands on the person ahead of them, to keep them from touching things on the way. Avoid the playground (in Cortez), which isn't sanitized. Instead, play kickball or soccer or catch. Blow bubbles. Roll down the hill together. Climb a tree. Ride bikes. It's amazing how much fun you can have outside.

And if you're lucky enough to have a backyard, don't waste it. Set up a sand box, water play, and other outdoor activities. Start planting a garden as soon as you can. Growing plants is life affirming, educational, and maybe even practical, if you can grow a little food.

Implement routines, but include free play and downtime.

Set up routines to help your family live in close quarters without getting on each other's nerves. A schedule will also keep screen time from taking over your child's life. Make sure your child is involved in a fun way in any work that needs to be done, like laundry or cooking, at specific times of the day when you work as a family. You may also want to plan on earlier bedtimes to keep everyone's immune system strong.

Your child will be reassured by routines during this time of uncertainty, but include lots of time in the schedule for free play and downtime. Children need unstructured play and creative outlets to work through stress and big emotions.

Create some “Me Time” as a part of the schedule for everyone.

You can't be emotionally generous to anyone else when you're running on empty. To stay centered, you need time when you're not engaging. And so do your kids. Make enforced quiet times part of the daily schedule. Kids can read or play quietly in separate rooms. Don't fritter that time away online. And don't use it to clean up. (Make that a fun task to do as a family!) Instead, find something that replenishes you: listen to a guided meditation, do some yoga, write in a journal.

Brainstorm together to come up with a Family Fun List.

Have your kids fill a jar with ideas of things they can do without adult supervision and without fighting. (I have created a list of screen-free ideas that children can do themselves. It will be available to you. You can decide what activities are age and/or developmentally appropriate for your child/children). Suggestion: Create a "Boredom Buster" Jar, print up or write the activities your child may be interested in doing and place them in the jar. Each day, they can select an activity from the jar.

But also make a list of fun things to do as a family that you can use to inspire yourself when you're worn out. Think cooperative board games, cooking together, and games like trying to draw with your feet.

Use screen time judiciously.

Creativity, fun and laughter help us manage stress and anxiety. Screens, by contrast, lure us with the promise that we can forget our problems and zone out. But we're just postponing the reckoning, so we usually end up feeling cranky afterwards.

Does that mean your child should be screen free? Probably not right now, especially if you're trying to work at home - unless screen-free life is well-established in your household.

Besides, screens can be useful right now to combat the isolation your child is probably feeling. Set up regular playdates on zoom or facetime for your child to hang with friends. Since kids aren't used to "playing" this way, offer structure: They can make up stories together, or show each other what they're building, or simply talk as they each do art.

But keep screens from taking over your child's life by sticking to the schedule. Put it on the calendar for times when you really need your own quiet, whether for a conference call, to meditate, or to get dinner on the table. Just say no when kids ask for additional screen time, referring them instead to their Boredom Buster Jar.

Expect sibling friction.

Use this opportunity to teach emotional intelligence, problem solving and negotiation skills.

- Make sure your kids know how to take space from each other gracefully, without anyone taking it personally.
- Teach your kids that they can express their needs to each other without attacking.
- Talk with your children about emotions and worries, so they learn to communicate more effectively and aren't taking their anxiety out on each other.
- Set up Sibling Special Time with an activity they love every day, but don't expect your children to play together all day, no matter how close they are. And don't expect older kids to spend a lot of time entertaining younger kids.
- Take your own parenting game up a notch by learning to intervene more effectively in sibling squabbles.

Finally, be sure that you're spending one on one time with each child, both to connect and to give them an opportunity to work through any worries they're having about the coronavirus, missing their friends, etc.

Expect friction with your partner, if you have one.

You can expect some of life's biggest stressors to increase during this pandemic. Some examples: cabin fever, economic worry, fear of the unknown and what the future brings, fear that elderly parents or other loved ones will get sick, terror as we see our child once again with his hands all over his sister's face, dealing with kids' meltdowns from boredom and anxiety, dread that we might lose our jobs, trying to have a conference call or take care of other work responsibilities to keep the paycheck coming in, trying to enforce house rules and routines, navigating differences in your discipline styles that are suddenly more apparent than ever, now that you're all living in a pressure cooker. Times like this would try any relationship. So be sure to structure in some antidotes to help you cope and connect. Set aside time every night to take turns listening to each other, non-judgmentally and without

interrupting. Look for opportunities for random acts of kindness and appreciation. Cultivate forgiveness and emotional generosity.

It may seem like forever, but this too shall pass. Why not take this opportunity to strengthen and sweeten your relationship, by finding a resource to help you learn to work through conflict in ways that bring you closer?

Start a family mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness practices reduce anxiety, and increase calm and compassion. To manage cabin fever with less stress, why not start a family mindfulness practice. Following you will find some meditation apps you can download onto your phone(s) and/or computer(s):

Calm

Declutter the Mind

Stop, Breathe & Think

Smiling Mind

Simple Habit

Ten Percent Happier

Safe 2 Heal

Give each other some grace.

Talk as a family about how this is an unprecedented situation. Humanity is learning so much! And your family can learn so much, too. But also, you'll need to give each other extra kindness and forgiveness right now. One of the best ways to fight cabin fever is to connect with each other warmly, and then to give each other space. Together, we will get through this and we will be stronger than before.