



AMERICAN  
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# Parenting during the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Advice from psychologists on the best ways to cope with the new way of life—and the new stressors—caused by the global health crisis.*

For many parents, home in the age of COVID-19 has become the office, the classroom, even the gym. Many parents are struggling to not only keep their children occupied, but also to oversee schooling, even as they telework, grocery shop and perform all the other daily necessities of family life. At the same time, children may be reacting to stress by acting out or regressing to behaviors long outgrown.

To help parents cope, psychologists offer this advice:

## **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EMOTIONS**

It's normal to feel fearful, anxious or stressed now. Discuss your experiences with relatives and friends or share a laugh. If you continue to experience problems, try a telehealth consultation with a mental health professional.

## **SET BOUNDARIES**

Boundaries blur when work and home life occur at the same place, making it more difficult to get things done or disconnect from work. To help, designate a specific area to work in, ideally a room with a door.

Also designate an area for schoolwork and homework. If you don't have a home office, consider setting up your children's homework space alongside your workspace. That way, you can model how to work productively.

Try setting a kitchen timer for 90 minutes and tell children you'll spend 15 minutes doing something fun with them when the buzzer goes off. When children know the plan, they're less likely to interrupt your work.

Thank your child for allowing you to do your work. Threats, such as loss of screen time, are far less effective.

## **ESTABLISH A ROUTINE**

It's unrealistic to think you and your children will put in normal hours during this stressful time.

But it's important to maintain a routine, even if children are getting or staying up later than usual. Routines help family members cope with stress and be more resilient. Post a written schedule of when you expect children to get up, do schoolwork, eat meals, play and go to bed. Also include times dedicated to your own work.



Remember not every hour needs to be scheduled. Allow for flexibility, play and free time.

#### **RELAX SCREEN TIME RULES**

Don't feel guilty about allowing more screen time than usual. You might allow your child to watch a movie or play a video game while you complete a work task, for example. Or help your child stay connected to friends via videoconferencing or multi-player video games.

Don't forego the rules entirely. Younger children should use a computer or tablet in common spaces rather than their rooms so that parents can monitor content. With teens, talk about appropriate content and screen time limits.

#### **COMMUNICATE WITH SUPERVISORS AND CO-WORKERS**

Explain your situation to your supervisor and colleagues. They may be unaware you're juggling work and home-schooling.

Negotiate with your boss about schedules and expectations. Work together to craft a plan that works for both you and your employer. Perhaps you can agree that you'll focus on home-schooling in the morning but be available for calls in the afternoon, for instance.

#### **SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES**

If there's another parent or caregiver in your home, negotiate child-care shifts. You might oversee schoolwork in the morning while your partner works, then trade off in the afternoon.

Get help from people beyond your home, too. Ask a grandparent or friend to video-chat with your child while you make an important work call, for example. Or trade off organizing virtual play dates with a neighbor, which can not only keep your children busy while you work but help them maintain friendships.

#### **PRACTICE SELF-CARE**

You—and everyone else in your family—need alone time every day. Take a walk, enjoy a long shower or just sit in your car. If you can't get away physically, put in earbuds and practice mindfulness meditation via your phone.

And practice self-compassion. Don't worry if you can't concentrate or let housekeeping standards slide. During this stressful time, it's important to go easy on your children and yourself.

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

APA's Psychology Help Center

[apa.org/helpcenter](https://www.apa.org/helpcenter)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Parents and Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019

[bit.ly/2KCCLK9](https://bit.ly/2KCCLK9)

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