

TOP PARENTING TIPS DURING COVID-19 FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

1

Reassure your child that your family is your top priority

In all your interactions with your child, stay as calm and comforting as possible. Say or otherwise communicate something like "I'm your parent, it's my job to keep you safe and we are doing everything we can."

2

Take care of yourself the best you can

Deal with your own distress by taking actions that give you a better sense of personal control. Stress management skills such as mindfulness and/or slow, deep, breathing can help reduce stress. Since previously available respite options may no longer be available, do what you can to help you feel restored. This might mean scheduling short periods of time away from the stress of the situation to do something for yourself, such as having a quiet cup of tea, reading a few pages of a novel, gardening or drawing. Keep healthy and safe (good personal hygiene, exercise daily, eat well, get enough sleep, avoid using alcohol or drugs to lessen stress). Avoid behavior that might increase your stress. For example, while it is helpful to keep informed about COVID-19, constant checking for updates can increase stress.

3

Make sure your children know you are open to their questions and worries

Children need to be able to express their concerns to parents and have their questions answered. When your child wants to share their feelings, stop what you are doing give them your full attention. Avoid telling your child how they should feel ("Don't be silly. You don't have to worry about that"). Let children know it is OK to be worried. If your child uses additional or alternative communication, it may be useful to use your child's communication system as well as a display of pictures depicting words that they might need to use to ask questions or tell you things that they already know about. Pictures to help with conversations about COVID-19 are available in *Stepping Stones Triple P Guide: Parenting children with a disability during COVID-19*.

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Be truthful in answering children's questions

Find out what they think they know about the issue before answering. Keep your answers simple. Get your information from trusted sources (e.g. UNICEF and the World Health Organization websites) rather than social media.

5

Get advice from your child's teachers, therapists and health care providers

If your child cannot attend their usual day-placement or therapy services, find out what activities are recommended over this period. If your child has a short- or long-term health condition, talking with your child's healthcare provider can guide decisions about how to manage their condition and access any needed equipment, medications or other supplies.

6

Maintain everyday family routines

Keep to usual rising times, mealtimes, and bedtimes. Involve your child in working out a daily plan of activities to help you and your child cope with being at home during this time. When things don't go to plan, be patient with yourself and your child.

7

Have a family plan of action

Plans are very helpful in times of anxiety and uncertainty to remind family members how to behave. The plan is likely to include regular handwashing, keeping a distance between yourselves and others, and physically staying away from vulnerable family members and friends. Where you can, involve your children in the creation of the plan. Use pictures to explain and remind everyone of these rules. As situations can change (e.g. new travel restrictions, school closures, gradual relaxation of restrictions), update the plan as needed.

8

Have plenty of interesting things to do at home

Busy children are less likely to be bored and misbehave. With your child, help create a list of 20 or more activities that will keep them busy (in addition to screen time).

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Take notice of behavior you like

Think about the values, skills and behaviors you wish to encourage in your children. There are many opportunities to teach your children important life skills (e.g. being caring, helpful, cooperative, getting on well with siblings, taking turns). Use praise, attention and rewards to encourage the behavior you like. Give them positive attention, letting them know you are pleased by telling them what they have just done ("Thank you for playing quietly while I was on the telephone.").

10

Help children learn to tolerate more uncertainty

The COVID-19 crisis is creating uncertainty for everyone. Parents need to find a way to accept uncertainty and through our actions and words show this acceptance to your children. It's OK to say, "I don't know; let's find out what we can." Big changes to children's lives can be hard and often scary. They can also create opportunities for learning new skills. Schedule coping and calming activities into your child's day and consider ways to teach new calming skills such as slow breathing and muscle relaxation.

11

Prepare a plan of care for your child

Establish a plan of care for your child and other family members in case you become ill. You may find it reassuring to have a plan worked out in case you need it. This may involve contacting your child's disability support provider or family and friends who you know could help you if you needed it. Gather information together that may be helpful for someone who was caring for your child for a few weeks.

12

Reach out and connect with loved ones

Make greater use of phones, online communication tools (video conferencing) and social media to keep in touch with family, friends, and neighbors. Remember to communicate your love and joy of getting to spend extra time with your child at this time.

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