HELPING OUR KIDS GO BACK TO SCHOOL WELL

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS DURING COVID-19









RESILIENCE NOW FOR PARENTS

JULY 2020

7 BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIPS



RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

When faced with a challenge, encourage your child to take some deep breaths. Help them understand that challenges can be good for the brain and the body, helping them grow and become stronger. Coach them to tell themselves, "I've got this!"

BREATHE

Taking deep breaths into the belly helps calm the mind and body. Try the four-square breath. Breathe into the belly for four, hold the breath for four, breathe out for four, and then pause for four. Repeat this six times.





COMMUNICATE

When talking with your kids, keep timing, language and emotion in mind. Use positive language and speak with compassion and empathy. Listen deeply and check your understanding.

BE COMPASSIONATE

When we see the world through our children's eyes we can appreciate how they perceive what is going on around them. Ask yourself - What is my child saying? Hearing? Seeing? Doing? How are they feeling?





ENCOURAGE CALM, CONFIDENCE, AND CURIOSITY

When speaking to your child about the coming semester, use neutral, facts-based language to boost calm, imagine what a school day will look like to increase their confidence, and embrace the 'novelty' of changes to help them see through a lens of curiosity.

NOTICE, NAME, AND NAVIGATE

To help manage strong emotions, coach your children to notice how their body feels when emotions begin to bubble up, name those emotions and then navigate the situation by choosing how to respond.





PRACTICE AHEAD

Talk in advance about what challenges there could be with school and help your child practice responding well in these scenarios. When a real-life stressor happens they will feel confident that they know how to respond.

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WE ARE RESILIENCE NOW FOR PARENTS

an international collective of wellbeing-in-education specialists that includes teachers, psychologists, coaches, researchers and parents with over 275 years of combined experience. We have come together to offer guidance to parents on how to support the social and emotional needs of their families during this challenging time.



Distress diminishes learning; well-being enhances learning Dr. Lea Waters

Since March we have been offering weekly tips via our website ResilienceNowforParents.org and posting them along with weekly live, open dialogues on our Facebook page.

We know both from research and from our own lived experience as parents and educators that in order for children and teens to be able to focus and learn well they need to feel safe and supported by the adults around them -- physically, socially, psychologically and emotionally.

This eBook has been prepared by our collective to help parents prepare for their children returning to classes as schools begin to reopen in various ways amidst the continuing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

Our intention is to offer practical and actionable tips that parents, grandparents, and others raising children and teens can use to boost their family's well being. We hope educators will find our tips useful as well. Our recommendations are drawn from findings from the science of flourishing and evidence-based practices in the field of Positive Psychology.





We recognize that every school district has its own way of reopening school buildings in terms of timing and rules. We also realize that these guidelines and decisions may be fluid depending upon the prevalence and community spread of virus cases in a particular country, community, county, system, state or region. Some schools may even be offering hybrid learning opportunities where students can be in a school building for in-person learning part of the day or week, and take classes virtually for the remaining class time. Some parents may have the option to not send their children to their school building at all, and do learning virtually sometimes called remote or distance learning - exclusively.

At the time of this writing, there are continued deliberations about how and when school buildings will and should reopen as school leaders consult with medical professionals, educators, and families, in order to make decisions about how best to serve students, teachers, administrators, and staff. We recommend that you check often with your child's school and local school district for continuing updates.

If you are still making the decision on whether to send your child back to in-person classes, please see our 'Questions to Consider' section to help you think things through. We hope that all stakeholders in education from parents to teachers and from educational leaders and staff members to students will find our tips useful in helping to successfully transition back to school, whenever, wherever, and however that may be.

We wish everyone well.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

The purpose of *Helping Our Kids Go Back to School Well* is to assist parents and children in returning to school as the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions are relaxed or abated. In using the E-book the User agrees to the following:

The User understands and agrees that the current environment surrounding the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID 19 Disease is unprecedented and circumstances are rapidly changing. The User agrees that participation in the recommendations and activities in this Ebook is voluntary and is not intended to increase protection from acquiring the SARS-CoV-2 virus or the COVID 19 disease.

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HELPING YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND WHAT STARTING OR GOING BACK TO SCHOOL MEANS THIS YEAR

School is likely to look very different this year. Depending on where you live and what the range of current local public health measures are, there are four likely scenarios for how school will happen:

- All online/remote learning (at home)
- A hybrid of online and at-school learning with special health & safety measures
- All at-school learning with special health & safety measures
- All at-school learning as usual without special health & safety measures

It could be that whatever your school is arranging is the same as it has been the past several months or it could be completely different. It may also be that one scenario is adopted for now, and then another one is implemented later in the year. Whatever school looks like for your child or children, helping them be as prepared as possible for starting or going back to school* is as important as ever.

The aim here is to actively engage with your children before school starts about what school will actually "look" like (based on one of the four scenarios above), so that your child or children have time to get used to any new approaches and can feel as comfortable, calm and confident as possible for when they actually start or go back to school.

(*We are using both 'starting' and 'going back to' school as we recognize that some children will actually be starting school for the first time and other children will be returning to school.)





ACCORDING TO UNICEF, CORONAVIRUS IS
THE BIGGEST GLOBAL CRISIS FOR CHILDREN
SINCE WORLD WAR TWO WITH
11% OF STUDENTS WORLDWIDE
HAVING THEIR EDUCATION IMPACTED



TIP: ENCOURAGING CALM, CONFIDENCE & CURIOSITY

When we can look forward to and embrace new situations with calmness, confidence and curiosity, we are more likely to navigate them with greater adaptability, ease and success.

TRY THIS: GATHER, CHOOSE, SHARE, IMAGINE, DISCUSS

1) Gather all the information you can

The first step is to ensure that you have all of the information from your child's or children's school about how students will attend (including how your child or children will get to school and home from school, assuming that your school's approach is one of scenarios 2-4 listed above). If you have a question or questions about something in particular that the school has not clarified (see the addendum at the back about how to decide about sending your child back to school) contact your school as soon as possible and ask a relevant school admininistration staff member to answer them.

2) Choose what to share and how to share it

Once you have all of the information you want and need, the next step is to choose what to share with your children and how to share it with them. Do you need to share all of the information or only certain bits of it? When is the best way to share it with them? For example, if you eat dinner together in the evenings, it can be something you discuss over dinner. Or, you can choose another time to sit down with your child or children to share the information. If possible, you can even include something nice or fun to look forward to as part of it. (See 'Creating Things to Look Forward To'.)

When you share the information with your children, go for a 'facts & fun' approach.

3) Share in a clear, neutral, 'facts & fun' way

space where they learn even nicer.

Share the facts about how schools are going to work using clear, plain, neutral language. Steer clear of "have tos" and "shoulds" as this can cause worry. .(See Chapter 2 on Fear.) For example, "At school, you'll all be wearing masks. You'll also be in smaller class sizes of 10 students per class." Or, "Online learning will happen from 9 to 11 am each day. Once you've clearly explained exactly how school will work, you can then add some fun to it. if your children are actually going to school and have to wear masks, you can offer to buy or make a mask with a design or print that they really like. If school is online and they will be learning from home, you can ask them what might make the table or desk

4) Imagine what it will be like

If your child is open to it, you can even ask them if they want to imagine together what school is going to be like. Even if school is not exactly as they picture it (which you can address with them once they do start to go to school), by imagining what a school day will be like, they can 'walk through' a 'typical' day from start to finish and get a feel for what it will be like. This will help them to build their calmness, confidence & curiosity about starting or going back to school and to frame school in a positive, open-minded way. A great way of helping your child to make this vision real is to have them picture what it is they want to wear on their first day and then have them actually wear that outfit on the first day. Whether they're learning at home, or going to school, and whether they have to wear a uniform or get to choose their own clothes, this way they are making the picture they imagined real!

5) Discuss any questions, ideas, thoughts or worries

Finally, invite your child or children to share with you any questions, ideas, thoughts or worries they may have. This will enable them to feel even calmer and more confident about going back to school and to embrace a truly curious approach. When we 'name it to claim it', we voice all of our ideas or concerns or worries and so can either act on them in a proactive way or diffuse them so that they do not become problematic.

WHY IT WORKS: OUR BRAINS LOVE NOVELTY & BEING CURIOUS

Our brains *LOVE* novelty and newness! That said, too many unknowns can cause worry and anxiety. By embracing the 'novelty' aspect of any changes that are happening at school, you can enable your child to frame them with curiosity. By combining this with sharing information with your child or children about how school is actually going to happen, you enable them to turn off any anxious 'what ifs' and embrace the 'what is' of school with calm and confidence. (For more on this see our tip about 'Working with Worry' in chapter 7, page 42.)



TALK ABOUT TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE

- How are you feeling about starting/going back to school?
- Is there anything you're wondering about or not sure of?
- What are you are looking forward to or excited about?
- Is there anything you're worried or scared about?

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

Like many around the world, we went into lockdown in March of this year. Our 11-year-old son's school was officially closed on Friday, March 20th – two weeks before the scheduled Easter school holidays. It all came as a shock and was very upsetting too since this was our son's last year at primary school and there would be none of the usual end-of-year celebrations.

We didn't expect our son to go back to school at all, but after 10 weeks of lockdown, schools were allowed to re-open on a very strict social-distancing and health & safety basis. What to do!? This was honestly one of the hardest decisions we've felt we've ever had to make as parents. By that point, our son, who is an only child, was starting to struggle with not seeing any friends and being so limited to home, so we weighed very very carefully the risks vs. the benefits of having him go back to school.

As part of our decision-making process, we contacted the principal of our son's school to ask a number of questions, including how the classrooms would be arranged, if the windows would be open or closed, if our son had to wear his school uniform or could wear 'own clothes', how lunchtime would work etc, all things that we never really had to think about or question before!

Our son's school put together an excellent and very detailed implementation plan for how the kids would go back. The principal even sent an email the Friday before our son went back on June 1st with a detailed, two-page photo collage showing the children how their desks would be laid out, what materials they would have (no materials would be shared), what the social-distancing stickers on the floor looked like etc. We were hugely relieved to receive this and share this with our son, because although we knew he was going back to his same 'old' school, it was going to be different in so many other ways...

Instead of a class of 30, he was going to be in a 'bubble' of 8 with no mixing with other 'bubbles'. He would not have his teacher from this year; he would have his teacher from last year. He would not be in his normal classroom from this year; he would be in his classroom from last year. He did not have to wear his uniform; he could wear his own clothes so that we could ensure a fresh change of clothes every day. (He liked this new rule a LOT!) He would not be able to play with all of his classmates in the playground at lunchtime; he would only be able to play with the classmates in his bubble. (This was very hard for our son at first, because one of his two 'besties' was in another bubble and the other one did not return to school.) He would not be allowed to go in the front gate of the school; he had to enter via one of the side gates. He would not be starting at 8:50 and finishing at 3:25 Monday-Friday as usual, he would be starting at 9:15 and finishing at 3:00 Monday-Thursday. So many changes and so many new 'parameters'!

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD (CONT'D):

Once we had all of the information to hand, we reviewed it with our parents 'hat' on and then we shared it with our son. This gave him a chance to 'digest' the information for himself and ask any questions. We talked everything through together and I even drove over with my son the Friday before he was due to go back so we could see his 'new' side gate entrance to school. The two-page photo collage was a huge help too as it helped our son to see (not just imagine) what school would be like. All this considered, we decided that on balance, the school was doing their utmost to ensure the safety of the students, teachers and staff, and so we would have our son go back to school on the proviso that at any moment we would take him out again if we considered it unsafe.

Thankfully not only did the teachers and all the children who went back all remain healthy and well, but our son was buoyed overnight by being with his old teacher and some of his classmates again! Yes, there were some hard moments and some tears, but on the whole they had a great time together. Yes, they did do some schoolwork, but the most valuable outcome of having our son go back to school was the boost to his social-emotional wellbeing. We are beyond grateful to his school and all the teachers and staff for stepping up to what was a seemingly impossible ask. We will never forget this time and I will forever be grateful that our son was able to go back to school. We were even able to watch his graduation ceremony via livestream, so there were tears of joy to boot!

Our son will start at secondary school in September - a new school for him and for us as parents. We're still concerned about his wellbeing and everyone's health and safety. We still have questions. What measures is the school putting in place? How safe will it be for him travelling to and from school? Should we really send him back or should we home-school him?... We know now though that by gathering and assessing all of the information available and asking all of the questions that come up for us, we will make the best possible decision at that time. And we will regularly review our decision too so that we can adapt as changes arise and the situation unfolds. Ultimately, our son's health and wellbeing comes first. It's what we want for all our kids, right? So to all the parents out there, we hope our story helps. May you make your own decisions based on what's right for you and your family. Stay safe and be well.

ADDRESSING YOUR CHILD'S FEAR ABOUT STARTING / RETURNING TO SCHOOL

As your child prepares to go back to school, they will undoubtedly be experiencing some fear and anxiety about returning to the world of "school." Some of the fears that they will be dealing with could be:

- **Future events** -- Is school going to be the same? Can I play sports, band, etc. this year?
- Imagined events -- Am I going to get the virus? Am I infected? Can I spread it without knowing?
- Real environmental dangers -- Will I be safe at school?
- **The unknown** -- Why is the world different? Am I behind in my learning? Am I going to fail? Will my friends still like me? Are my friends returning to school?



STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

Scarlett loves dogs. She wants every dog she meets to love her and to show her affection. Scarlett's grandparents adopted a new dog. Bo, who had been neglected by his previous owners. Bo was often nervous around new people, especially children. He reacted out of fear, growling or even biting people whom he saw as a threat. Re-enter Scarlett. She wanted Bo, as the newest member of her family, to love her. She went to hug Bo and was nipped on the cheek. It wasn't a hard bite, but it scared Scarlett. Every time she came around Bo, she was afraid of him. She cried and ran away. Her fear of Bo, that he might bite her again, kept her from enjoying Bo. She got anxious when he was in the house. By that time, Bo had become more comfortable with people, but Scarlett still had that fear. It took some time for her to be around Bo with other people, being able to pet him and sit with him, for her to feel okay with Bo. She had a reason to be afraid, but her fear caused her to panic and feel anxious to the point where she did not enjoy her time. She had to learn how to manage her fear and work with Bo so that he knew she loved him and wanted to be his friend. Overcoming that fear has led her to have a good relationship with Bo and other dogs.





TIP: FEAR IS OKAY

There is a lot of uncertainty about what school will look like, what COVID-19 will do or how we will manage it, and just general anxiety about how the world is moving right now. It can seem very scary, especially because they are so young and don't yet have the life experience or resilience skills to deal with their fear. What we need to do for our young people and, possibly, for ourselves is to understand that our fears and our worries are normal and understandable. It is okay to feel afraid or stressed. Young people need to be able to see that their fear is being taken seriously, but it is also important that you help them to not be overwhelmed by these feelings of fear. So, our goal in this specific strategy is to let young people know that it is okay to be afraid, to show them how you and their schools are making things safe for them, and to give them specific coping strategies for dealing with their thoughts and emotional triggers.

TRY THIS: I AM AFRAID/I WAS AFRAID

This exercise allows you to move from a place of fear to a place of acceptance and gratitude.

identify the situation that causes you to feel afraid.
 Tell yourself, "I am afraid." Even that simple acknowledgement is going to force your brain to look for the source of the fear: "I am afraid of getting the virus and getting sick or spreading it to others."



- look around: are you in any immediate danger? In this case, do you feel any symptoms or have you had contact with someone who has? If so, you need to tell your parents so they can get you tested.
- not in any immediate danger? you have time to bring yourself down out of
 that anxious state and go through a process of acceptance. Tell yourself that it is
 okay to be afraid: "I am afraid of getting the virus and getting sick or spreading
 it. I have made sure that I am not in immediate danger. It is okay for me to feel
 afraid and to keep myself safe, but I do not need to let that fear overwhelm me."
 Begin to feel the tension release enough for you to begin to make rational
 decisions.
- inject some gratitude into your self-talk: "I was afraid, but I was not in any danger. I am grateful for my fear alerting me to possible danger." Gratitude is a nice, positive emotion that can calm us down. If you need to get somewhere safe to make you feel less anxious about your situation, you can do so with the knowledge that you are in control.

WHY IT WORKS: ACCEPTANCE AND GRATITUDE LEAD TO RESILIENCE

Bringing awareness and acceptance to scary situations helps young people process what they are experiencing. Not putting that negative label on fear or treating it like a weakness will also help them to treat it like a normal function of their body and mind. Building this fear response will help them deal with the fears given above, as it will give them a step by step process to go from initial fear trigger to acceptance. When they can accept their fears, they will be much more likely to be able to overcome them. Gratitude builds positive emotions, which can lead to increased resilience to our fear impulses. When we treat fear as a helpful tool, instead of a negative stressor, we can use it to our benefit.

Ways to Build Connection: Methods that you can use to connect with your child is to share your own worries with them, but also tell them how you are making plans and setting goals to deal with that fear. Talk with your school's administrators or teachers to ask them how they are specifically making school safe for your child. Make specific plans with your child to keep them safe. When they feel like you are taking them seriously and are making plans for them (and with them), they will begin to feel more confident.

WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TALK ABOUT TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

- How do you feel when you think about returning to school?
- What are things that we can do together to help you feel less fearful or anxious?
- How can you use your fear to be more prepared?
- What are things I/we can do to make you feel more prepared and safe?
- What feels good or happy about going back to school?
- When you are feeling calm, how can you help a classmate who is feeling anxious?

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

The phrase "There's nothing to fear but fear itself" shows itself very clearly in my son. The fear itself, and the anxiety it causes, is clearly what wreaks havoc on his emotional state, ability to learn and ability to enjoy the present moment. I've recently realized that while feeling afraid my son was often trying to act brave, in part for me and my husband, and that actually saying out loud "I'm afraid" is something none of us had really done before. It's amazing how just saying "I'm afraid of..." and filling in the blank takes a lot of the power away from the fear. I've seen the relief in my son's face after coaching him to do this.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON STUDENTS' ABILITY TO LEARN

During these challenging times anxiety is on the rise. How your child will learn when they return to school has likely changed, and change brings new challenges and stress. Stress and anxiety can be debilitating, however it can also motivate your child to succeed. Coping well with stress is one of the biggest predictors of a meaningful life. Helping your child attach meaning to their stress is just one way to help motivate them in a way that will help them learn. In addition to helping you understand the impact anxiety has on your child's ability to learn, our goal is to provide you with some strategies you can implement to help your child succeed.

Coping well with stress is one of the biggest predictors of a meaningful life.

FOR THOSE WHO DO HAVE ACCESS TO THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY, THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT LEARNING ONLINE CAN BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS.

SOME RESEARCH SHOWS THAT ON AVERAGE,
STUDENTS RETAIN 25-60% MORE MATERIAL WHEN
LEARNING ONLINE COMPARED TO ONLY 8-10% IN A
CLASSROOM. THIS IS MOSTLY DUE TO THE STUDENTS
BEING ABLE TO LEARN FASTER ONLINE; E-LEARNING
REQUIRES YO-60% LESS TIME TO LEARN THAN IN A
TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM SETTING BECAUSE STUDENTS
CAN LEARN AT THEIR OWN PACE, GOING BACK AND REREADING, SKIPPING, OR ACCELERATING THROUGH
CONCEPTS AS THEY CHOOSE.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM





TIP: ACTIVATE A CHALLENGE RESPONSE

When faced with stress we have two possible responses. One is called a Threat Response and the other, a Challenge Response.

In a **Threat Response**, we perceive the demands of the situation to exceed our resources. This causes the brain to go into high alert which triggers a fight or flight response. When this happens, your child's ability to think, focus and make good decisions decrease and emotions like anxiety and/or anger are heightened. Because the ability to focus and concentrate is thwarted and emotions are high, your child's ability to learn and perform well declines. For example, children who struggle with test anxiety experience a Threat Response.

In a **Challenge Response**, although the situation before us is difficult, we believe we have the resources to meet the demand. When your child experiences a Challenge Response, they might still experience some anxiety, however, their ability to focus, process and encode information increases along with their ability to perform. Notice, in a challenge response your child might still have some anxiety and experience some physiological symptoms of anxiety such as rapid heartbeat. This is because your child's brain is preparing their brain and body to take on the challenge. It does not mean they are having a panic attack. An athlete that experiences some nervous energy and being in the "zone" right before they have to compete is an example of a Challenge Response.

TRY THIS: REFOCUS AND REFRAME

- **Help your child breathe**. By taking a few slow breaths from the belly, you can help your child calm down the part of the brain that is activated in a Threat Response.
- Help your child explore why learning matters to them. When we attach meaning to the stress, we are motivated and driven which moves us towards a Challenge Response.
- Educate them regarding the Challenge Response. Help them understand that a rapid heartbeat does not mean panic. Rather, it is their brain's way of firing their brain and body up to take on the challenge. Their focus, attention and performance is actually greater when this happens.
- Pay attention to what they are saying and help them use more realistic language. For example, if they are saying, "I can't do this. I'm going to fail." Help them reframe it. "This is challenging but I can figure it out."
- Ask them about past challenges and how they managed to get through it. What did they do then that might be helpful in this current situation? By doing so, you can help your child see they have resources available to help them and activate the part of the brain involved in a Challenge Response.

TRY THIS (CONT'D):

- Encourage them to engage in mindfulness practices. Mindfulness helps us to be more aware of our thoughts, feelings and the environment around us in the present moment. Mindfulness has been shown to improve self-regulation and decision-making skills. It strengthens the part of the brain needed to trigger a Challenge Response.
- Make sure your child is getting enough sleep. When your child does not get enough sleep, it puts their brain into high alert making it difficult to manage their daily stressors. They are much more likely to experience a Threat Response when they are sleep deprived. According to pediatricians, the amount of sleep our children and teens need, on average, is as follows:



AGE 6-13 NEED 9-11 HOURS OF SLEEP AGE 14-17 NEED 8-10 HOURS OF SLEEP 18 AND UP NEED 7-9 HOURS OF SLEEP

WHY IT WORKS: THE BRAIN RESPONDS TO WHAT WE SAY

When faced with adversity, our brain listens to what we say. For example, if your child is saying "I can't do this. It's too hard. I'm going to fail", your child will activate a Threat Response. If however he or she says, "This is hard and challenging but I can do this. I can figure it out", their brain will activate a Challenge Response. Research has demonstrated that simply educating people on the stress responses helps them learn to activate the Challenge Response to stress.

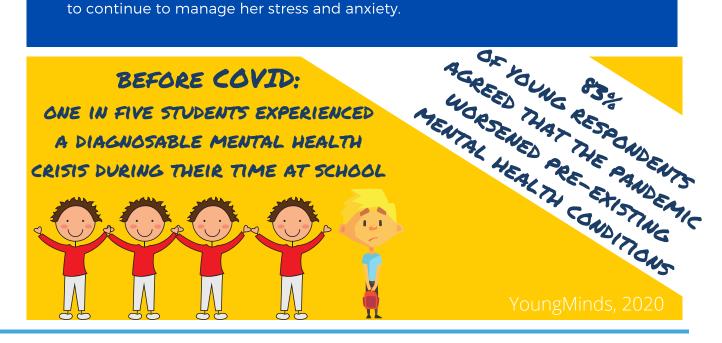


WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

- Can we practice breathing together?
- How is this meaningful to you?
- Is there another way to look at this?
- Remember when you struggled with... What did you do then that was helpful then that may help you now?

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

My daughter was born with what used to be known as Asperger's Disorder and ADHD. When she reached middle school, her ability to manage the school schedule, classroom changes, navigating the school building more independently, hormonal changes, and the pre-teen social circles that began to form was quite overwhelming. The struggles caused her to begin to have issues with high anxiety. Quite often she would come home from school with a distressing situation on her mind and feelings of anxiety flooding her brain and body. Bringing her awareness to her rapid breathing, I would share with her the strategy to slow her breathing by inhaling deeply through her nose, counting to four, then exhaling for as long as she could through her mouth. As we practiced together, I encouraged her to begin to slow her breathing back to normal, extending the exhalation longer each time. When she had calmed her breathing, we would then begin to talk about the situation. She would explain what happened, including what she said and did. Once she finished her story. I would begin to ask her questions, questions that would offer her a possible explanation that would be different than how she had perceived it. After some discussion, she would come to the conclusion that maybe she misunderstood the situation. Then we would discuss ways that she could rectify it; most often she would say she needed to talk to the other person and apologize. After she graduated from school, she began to attend a Transitions program where she learned all the life skills she would need to get and hold a job and begin to live independently. With the help of support staff, instructors, and directors, my daughter has also learned to practice mindfulness on a daily basis to help her to continue to manage her stress and anxiety.



CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Have you ever had a conversation that went wrong? You know the kind where you try to compliment and they end up offended. Or when you want to hear about your child's day and they bite your head off or turn quiet and sullen instead of talking. In times of crisis getting communication right is incredibly important and yet many of us have never had the opportunity to learn proper communication skills. The good thing is crisis communication skills work across all types of upheaval, not just health pandemics. Need to talk about a failed test, a medical diagnosis or a sudden change of plans? These tips will help there too. To start, think about your intention or goal for the conversation. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Does this need to be communicated?
- Does this need to be communicated now?
- Does this need to be communicated by me?
- How can I communicate so I will be heard?

A foundation of trust and respect is where good communication begins. Let's assume you already have that with your children. The next steps are sincerity - you mean what you say, reliability - you keep your promises, and competence - you don't have to pretend to be a medical expert or a school administrator. In fact your kids spot this type of inauthenticity from a mile away. Avoid making promises you cannot keep. Stick to what you know. Model flexibility. For example, instead of saying "I'm sure soccer will be on next year" when you have no way of knowing or impact as to this being true, try saying, "Not having soccer is frustrating. Let's figure out a way to keep up your skills in the backyard.

Before tackling a heavy topic, take a breath!





TIP: BREATH TO REGULATE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Whenever you feel overwhelmed by your emotions, your to-do-list, your finances or your inability to answer your child's questions about school, masks, sports, etc., one of the best things to do is take a 90-second break to breathe deeply and slowly.



TRY THIS: GIVE YOURSELF A TIME OUT

If at all possible, physically move to a private space (the restroom is often a good choice) where you can close the door, close your eyes and take a few rounds of deep slow breaths.

This allows you the opportunity to get calm and centered before you start speaking.

With small children, modelling this in front of them or inviting them to try along with you teaches them a really useful skill that they can use before hard conversations, before taking a test or before public speaking. Deep breaths work to calm the fight/flight/freeze reaction that accompanies tough conversations.

WHY IT WORKS: CHECK OUT CHAPTER 5 WHERE THERE'S MORE DETAILED INFO ABOUT THE POWER OF BREATH





TIP: CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY

Communication really is an art form. Knowing how and when to have the conversation and considering word choice is as important as your key message. The way we speak has a powerful impact on our ability to be successful and happy yet few of us are intentional with our choice of words. Studies have shown that use of negative words such as "no" can actually change the release of hormones and neurotransmitters to ones that damage key structures that regulate your memory, feelings, and emotions.



TRY THIS: CONSIDER THE POWER OF YET, BUSY, SHOULD AND NO

1) YET: The most powerful word in your vocabulary might be the little word YET. We can transform limiting statements like "I can't go to dance" and "I can't play with my friends' by adding 'yet' to the end.

This changes the sentiment from something you cannot do to something you aspire to do. Your brain recognizes the subtle difference between a hopeless statement and one that suggests that at a future time it will happen.

2) BUSY: Take BUSY out of your life. The word busy has certainly become a buzzword of this generation. Being busy implies that you are doing important things. Even though work from home and school from home was busy, you are making it through.

By replacing busy with productive or full, you empower yourself to think of your day as productive without implied turbulence. When you tell attention-seeking kids "I'm busy" which can be translated by them as "doing something more important than spending time with you". Wipe this word out of your vocabulary and let your children know that time together is always what you enjoy and value.

TRY THIS (CONT'D)

3) No more SHOULDs

There is not just one way to parent. There are many ways to cope with physical distance regulations. Your inner voice sometimes tells you that you should be doing or being different than you are, for example:

- "You should do more crafts with your children"
- "You should be feeding the kids more vegetables"
- "You shouldn't take your child to the grocery store it's dangerous".

Catch yourself whenever you think or say you "should" be doing something. A should is an external expectation - something your family values, or your pop culture or your religion has led you to believe. It's easy to fall into a pit of guilt and despair over all of the things you think you should be doing.

Change the focus to your internal expectations - things you want to do or get to do. It's self-compassion in action and it shifts the tone when you ask someone to do something as a request rather than telling them they should do something which can feel like an order which is often met with pushback.



4) No more 'I'll TRY'

Yoda had it right when he said: 'Do or do not. There is no try.'

Try implies that you probably won't do it or if you do give it a go you won't be successful. Take 'try' right out of your vocabulary to adopt a more positive and powerful mindset. If you intend to do something, do it. If you have no intention of doing something then own that. By speaking your truth you align with your true intentions. If you are only going to 'try' you are likely to end up disappointing yourself or your child and quite frankly, we all need less disappointment right now.

5) Fewer 'NOs'

Talk positively, When you move towards what you want rather than away from what you want, you speak with a much more powerful voice. Instead of saying "Stop arguing with your brother."

Say "I would love to hear you speak kindly to one another."



WHY IT WORKS: OUR WORDS MAKE OUR WORLD

Our words make our world. Changing the way we speak to ourselves and others by **making better word choices** positively impacts our optimism and improves others' willingness and ability to hear what we're saying.







SOCIAL DISTANCE	PHYSICAL DISTANCE
PICKY	DISCERNING
EXHAUSTED	RECHARGING
OVERWHELMED	IN DEMAND
CRITICISM	GUIDANCE
I HATE	I prefer
DON'T	WHY NOT TRY
DEFIANT	INDEPENDENT

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

"When my niece Monica was about six years old, her mother told her that she needed to get in the car immediately. After unceremoniously herding her unwilling older siblings into the vehicle, Monica learned that they were going to the doctor's office and that she would be getting her shots.

With no conversation, it was a silent ride. My aunt finally got everybody into the office. It was Monica's turn. She stoically sat and got her required vaccinations, but surprisingly did not cry or even move an inch.

Getting ready to leave the examination room, her mother noticed that Monica was not looking relieved, but was clearly terrified.

"You're all done, honey! What's wrong?" my aunt asked. Monica quavered: "Well, when am I going to get shot?"



TIP: ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

The first question asked is the most important; it frames the path for more questions and the possibility for growth and resilience. We all know the frustration of asking a 'yes or no' question to a child while secretly hoping for more information! When beginning a discussion, carefully consider the first question. Keep it open-ended, framing it from a sense of your child's strengths.



TRY THIS: KEEP THE DIALOGUE GOING

When you ask YES and NO questions, the conversation loop closes after one answer. For a more meaningful exchange, try using open-ended questions. For example, in the midst of telling your child about all the upcoming changes to school, use something like: "We've talked about a lot of changes with school. I know that you have many strengths. You're thoughtful, kind, funny, smart and very creative. What are some specific ways that you can use your strengths to get used to these changes? How can you use your strengths to help your classmates who might be struggling or even your teacher?"

A question or set of questions like this can:

- Give you insight into your child's understanding of these changes
- Boost your child's confidence level; you are demonstrating your belief that your child can and will successfully maneuver through these changes;
- Generate creativity and problem-solving in your child
- Generate compassion for other classmates and teachers

WHY IT WORKS: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

David Cooperrider's work on the incredibly dynamic power of our words and questions is a part of what is known as Appreciative Inquiry. Originally designed as a method of effecting positive corporate change, this body of work has evolved into almost every field.



TIP: WATCH YOUR TONE, TIMING, LANGUAGE & EMOTION

TONE - When speaking to kids parents often feel a need to be **dictators** rather than **partners**. Listen closely to your tone to see if you speak with a different cadence or volume than you use with other adults. A sing-songy voice can feel belittling and a harsh tone can put your child into fight/flight/ flee which ambushes their ability to hear you. Speak to your child using the same voice you would use when speaking with an adult you respect.

TIMING - Consider both the *time of day* (we are all on low reserves at bedtime) and the *timing* (are you running to jump on a call or is dinner about to burn) before you begin a conversation with your child or teen. **STOP** the conversation (or at least pause it until later) if you or your child are *Hungry*, *Angry*, *Lonely* or *Tired*. Your personal energy is like a rechargeable battery. Wait instead until you are *fully charged* to initiate important conversations around boundaries, family expectations etc.

LANGUAGE - The words you choose are important. **Use simple and clear language** and check-in to make sure what you said was what they heard. For example, saying "you have to stay away from people" is less clear than standing six feet apart and saying "this is how far you need to stand from your friends at school".

EMPATHY & COMPASSION - In times of chaos, kids need additional reassurance that everything is okay. Make sure you are offering a shoulder to cry on when they need one and that you aren't minimizing their feelings. Remind your family that it's okay to have a bad day where fear or loneliness seems to dominate. If your child says "I'm scared to go to school." instead of saying "You don't need to be scared - school is safe" you might lead with acknowledging the feelings "I hear that you are scared. Can you tell me more about that?" What your child fears may have nothing to do with your own fears of infection - they may be scared of masks or worried that their friends have forgotten them. Hugs and listening mean more than problem-solving.



TRY THIS: CONSIDER <u>HOW</u> YOU SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID

When you catch yourself communicating in a way that doesn't work, it's a perfect time to demonstrate *making a mistake gracefully* and say "I wish I had said" or "I am working on...". This creates a *shared humility* and *common humanity* that is connecting. Work with your word choice, your timing and your tone with specific goals. You can also try asking your kids to coach you - "" am working on using positive words, could you help me by pointing it out if I say "no, not, never, can't or other words like those?". Kids LOVE to point out your mistakes!

WHY IT WORKS: OUR WORDS MAKE OUR WORLD

When you place a focus on your own communication skills you will be rewarded by being heard more easily. Remember, a big part of communication involves listening in an open-minded and non-critical way. **We have 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason!**





WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

Having both proactive and reactive conversations are important. Proactive conversations often happen on your agenda; reactive conversations are more commonly initiated by your child.

Proactive topics include staying 6 feet apart and wearing masks. They also include reassurance. For teens, you might want to discuss the size of your family bubble and their role in keeping you all safe.

- Initiating these conversations in the car or on a walk are great ways to engage without the added pressure of eye contact if the topic feels difficult
- Reassuring your kids that although everything isn't 'normal', everything is 'fine' is important
- If everything isn't fine (job loss, death, etc.) you may want expert help on what, when and how to have a conversation. The age of your child and the situation will factor into how to have a conversation with your child
- If they initiate, it is important that you can give your full presence and energy to the conversation. These windows of opportunity may be infrequent so shifting your priorities to allow conversation to flow naturally may be the best plan. If you cannot participate fully, asking for a scheduled time to finish the discussion, say over dinner or after work, can be a good alternative.

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

The topic of COVID seems to have snuck into some of the regular child-centered things; my son spends more time on his iPad, and he's probably overheard more adult conversations than I'd like. This is probably why he's been more sensitive to any additional stress lately. So now, when my son is upset, we try to solve the situation at the time but don't talk about it in much detail then. I've found that at bedtime when we are reading and relaxing together is a good time to bring up things that happened during the day in a calm way. I express sincerity in wanting to know what was going on for him during stressful times earlier in the day, and then together, we look at leveraging "the power of yet" (my son loves this phrase). For example, when my son expressed sadness about not being able to go to New York to visit family I explained that "we are going to New York to visit family, just not yet". We then started to make plans for what he wanted to do when he was in New York and decided to call some family members to talk about our plans the next day. I've used this strategy for big and small things so that I barely ever have to tell my son "no" anymore, it's always "not yet".

AVOID THIS COMMUNICATION FAIL

In the current COVID crisis, leaders can "tip to vertical". Tipping to vertical means taking responsibility for all decisions rather than including all stakeholders in the conversation.

If you are a principal, **include** your teachers. If you are a parent, **include** your children. Ultimately, one leader is "**steering the canoe**", yet handled poorly the leader is met with resistance and the others in the canoe stop paddling or jump out entirely. As a Mom or Dad, it's easy to feel that making all of the decisions unilaterally somehow protects the other family members. It doesn't.

Almost all people feel better when they are part of the decision-making process.

- 1. Even though your children have very little control over rules and boundaries right now, helping them to feel like they are part of the solution by following rules is powerful.
- 2. Give them **more power over the choices** they can make like what to wear and if they will wait in the car or join you in the grocery store (depending on their age).
- 3. It is not your job to keep your children in a good mood at all times. It is your job to ask them what they need when a mood turns sour. "Do you want me to listen, to give you space to process or to help problem-solve?" is a useful question.

This way you can still steer the canoe AND paddle all together!



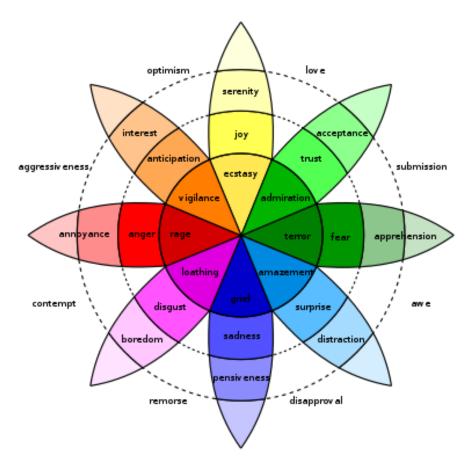
CHAPTER 5

MANAGING STRONG EMOTIONS

As our kids shift into a new normal, this is going to require them to act in new ways. From wearing masks to washing hands to keeping physical distance from their friends, life is going to look quite different at school. All of these new things will call upon our children's self-discipline.

Self-discipline is like a muscle. Without support and with overuse, it can become fatigued. As self-discipline wanes and strong emotions start to rise, this combination could result in potentially explosive reactions. The tips in this chapter will help with this.

From teaching our kids how to identify their emotions early to breath practices to ways to proactively plan ahead, there are lots of actionable things we can do to help our children manage strong emotions as they rise up.









TIP: NAME IT TO CALM IT

This tip has three powerful steps:

- **First** we **notice** how we are feeling in our bodies or the actions that we are doing.
- **Second** we **name** what emotions are rising up in us
- Third we navigate to a chosen response

This can work in two ways. You can help your child from the outside by noticing, naming and helping them navigate. And you can teach them how to use this tool from the inside, where they learn to notice, name and navigate. We have examples of each listed below.



Notice - This is about helping your child be more mindful of what's going on inside of them. Examples can be, "my stomach is clenching" or "my face is getting red" or "I feel like throwing this book across the room." From the outside, you will need to rely more on what you can see or hear. "I heard you slam the door" or "Your head is down and your shoulders seem heavy."

Name - Next we describe how we are feeling. "I am really mad!" or "I feel hurt" or "I am jealous." From the outside, use language like "I am guessing that you are feeling disappointed. Is that right?" or "You seem to be upset by something. Is that true?" Sometimes your child will reject your assessment even if it is accurate. Respond with "ok, how about you tell me how you are feeling instead?" Even if they push back, there is value to drawing attention to what is going on inside of them.



Navigate - Now that we are more aware of what is going on within us, this is where we *choose* how to respond. As you practice this together, you can learn from your child what speaks to them best. This will help them build out the coping skills most suited to them. As you explore you can ask things like, "How about we take some big belly breaths?" or "Let's take a break and play with the dog for a few minutes." or "Would it be helpful to talk to your friend about how they hurt your feelings? How about you practice what you would say first?"

WHY THIS WORKS: MINDFULNESS TOOLS ARE POWERFUL

When we help our kids recognize what is going on in their bodies, this becomes an early warning system for them. By naming emotions early, our children can have a better handle on managing them. The more that our emotions build up inside of us, the more likely it is that they will come out in really big and uncontrollable ways.

When your child names their emotions, recognize them and give them permission to feel that way, even if it makes you uncomfortable. When we tell our children that they are wrong to feel a certain way, it does a couple of things:

- First, it makes them doubt their ability to assess their own internal landscape
- Second, when a child tries to squash certain emotions because they aren't allowed, this often boomerangs back in even bigger ways

Both the notice and name steps of this process helps shift our kids out of the "hot" part of our brain that governs emotion (the limbic center) into the cooler part of our brain (the prefrontal cortex). This means that they will feel more in control of themselves and their decisions.



WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

When starting a conversation with your child it may be helpful to begin from a place of curiosity and with the spirit of exploration.

Some suggested questions:

- I am curious and interested in learning more about what you are experiencing...
- Is this a feeling that you have had before?
- When was the last time that you experienced this feeling?
- Was the situation that you were in the same, or was it different?
- What kinds of things did you do to cope with that feeling the last time you were in this situation?
- Once you were able to cope with the feelings you were having, did it help you to come up with solutions for the situation?

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

This first example shows how to use this tip witnessing notice, name, navigate from the outside.

Notice - Parent says, "I notice that you stopped working and tossed your pencil aside and did a heavy sigh and put your head in your hands."

Name - Parent continues, "I am guessing that you are feeling a little annoyed. Do you think that is how you are feeling?"

Navigate - Parent suggests, "Perhaps we can start by taking 3 cleansing breaths together to get ourselves centered so that we can begin to brainstorm solutions for moving forward. Once we have done that I know you will have some good ideas for how we can do that will work to get the job done..."

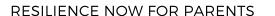
This second example shows how to model the tip *from the inside*, where the parent vocalizes how they are feeling step-by-step with their child. In this instance, the parent is choosing to model this because they have noticed that their child has difficulty waiting.

You have travelled to the store for a contactless curbside pick-up. When you get there you observe that there are no employees at the pick-up site and there is a sign instructing you not to get out of your car. Your children are with you and you need to be at another location within 30 minutes.

Notice - Say to your kids: "Huh. I guess I will wait patiently for a couple of minutes and see if anyone comes out from the store to deliver us our order because I see a sign there saying that they would prefer that I not get out of the car." After the two minutes are up you say, "My body feels a little restless and my shoulders are getting tense."

Name - Say: "I am a little confused. This is the time I was given for this pick-up. I am feeling disappointed and I can feel myself start to get irritated with this situation."

Navigate - Say, "Luckily I have a group of children with problem-solving superpowers in the back seat of my car. What are some ideas that you have of what we could do to solve this problem?" Brainstorm ideas as a group such as calling the store manager, honking the horn, going to your other appointment etc. The children will get the experience of generating solutions as well as the experience of family teamwork. Plus, they will have fun while doing it!





TIP: BREATHE THROUGH IT

Slowing down breathing helps calm the mind and refocuses our individual and collective intention.

TRY THIS: THREE SIMPLE BREATH PRACTICES

4-Square Breath

To do this, breathe in for four counts, drawing the breath into the belly, hold the breath for four, breathe out for four, hold the breath out for four. Repeat.

Peace Begins with Me

Take an easy seat. Spine is tall. Hands rest on the thighs, palms up. Bring the thumbs and pointer fingers together (like an okay symbol) and say "peace". Do this with both hands. They are still resting on the thighs, palms up, arms soft. Next, thumb to middle finger and say "begins". Then thumb to ring finger and say "with". Lastly, thumb to pinkie finger and say "me." Repeat for 90 seconds to two minutes. Teach your child that this can be done silently with their hands under their desk at school, if they need a tool to use in the moment.

Shark Fin Breath

Take a slow breath in. Bring one hand to your forehead, fingers pointing up like a shark fin. Slowly move your hand down to your chest as you breathe out. Move your hand up to your forehead as you take a slow breath in. Repeat 7 times. Notice how you feel.

WHY IT WORKS: NEGATIVE EMOTION CAN DISPERSE IN 90 SECONDS, AND BREATHING DEEPLY HELPS

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor is a Harvard-trained neuroanatomist whose work shows that the chemicals produced by negative emotion can disperse in 90 seconds, and breathing deeply helps. Ninety seconds of belly breathing can:

- Reduce stress levels in your body
- Lower your heart rate
- Lower your blood pressure
- Reduce symptoms of depression
- Better manage chronic pain
- Better regulate your body's reaction to stress and fatigue
- Reduce the possibility of burnout for caregivers





WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

- Which of these breathing practices shall we try?
- Which one did you like best?
- How did you feel before this kind of breathing?
- How did you feel after?
- When would you say it would be helpful to use this kind of breathing?
- If you did this with your eyes open, do you think you could use the four square breath or Peace Begins With Me at school when you feel like you need to calm down?

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

With quarantine being our new normal, anxiety has been higher than usual for our whole family. My son, who has autism and anxiety, has always struggled with intrusive negative thoughts, but they are more frequent now. I had been trying to have him avoid or reject these thoughts or worked to distract him. These strategies did not work though, and actually seemed to increase his fear. Now we are grateful to have several strategies that are making a positive difference. We identify, or notice, our fear and our worries, and we name them. My son will say out loud "I'm having worries". This opens the door for me to help. If he doesn't do it on his own (which he often does now), I will ask "should we breathe through it?". We started using the 4-square Breath which worked wonders to help us both become calmer and then able to use other strategies as well, if needed. Because we've both gotten better at this, we now usually do the 4-7-8 breathing which just encourages us to hold our breath a little longer and blow it out a little slower. My son counts on his fingers as he goes through each stage.



TIP: COPING AHEAD

Use this powerful tool to help kids plan in advance for the emotional challenges that might come up at school. It means talking about what's coming, being direct about what negative emotions can arise, and strategizing how your child will get through it.



TRY THIS: PRACTICE THE SITUATION

- **1. Practice -** This might be having to wear a mask, sitting next to people on the bus, dealing with other people's anxiety, missing friends who might choose to not return to in-person school or other things. Talk about what feelings this might stir up in your child.
- 2. Decide what skills to use Invite your child to talk about what skills might work best for them to handle that situation. Get specific. Would it be helpful for them to distract themselves with another activity if they are feeling sad? Do they need a break? Outside of school, maybe they can listen to music, call a friend, or go for a run? Get creative about what exactly your child will do to cope.
- **3. Imagine -** Now that you know the situation and the skills, invite your child to imagine the situation in their mind as vividly as possible. Picture themselves actually in the situation, not watching it. Imagine it happening in the present, not the past. Walk them through this experience, asking them to bring details to mind: Where are they? Who is with them? What are they thinking or feeling?
- **4. Rehearse what your child will do -** This is still part of the visualization you are leading your child through. Now that they are in the situation, ask them to picture what they will do clearly in their minds. What do they think? What do they say? How do they say it?
- **5. Relax**. Take a breath and give your child a high five. This is a new life skill, so just practicing is a win.

WHY IT WORKS: NEUROSCIENCE

This is a powerful tool for many reasons. By mindfully thinking of situations that might cause upset and then making a plan, we boost our confidence in our ability to handle these challenging situations. This also engages the thinking brain, which helps quiet the emotional brain. It's our emotional brain that can cause our child to lash out or panic when faced with upset. And when we visualize something, that experience becomes wired into our brains, especially when we practice it multiple times. This makes it easier to grab those reactions or skills when the real situation comes up.



WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

- What are some of the things that might worry you about going back to school?
- Could we try to use the Coping Ahead strategy to help you feel better about this?
- What are the skills you feel you naturally go to when you are stressed?
- Do you think we could use those in our Coping Ahead plans?
- How did you feel before we practiced Coping Ahead? How do you feel now?
- How many times do you think we should practice this so that you feel really good about handling the situation that is worrying you?



CHAPTER 6

EMPATHY, COMPASSION AND RESILIENCE - FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN

COVID-19 and its repercussions for families have been and will be one of the world's biggest storms to weather. But like any storm, there are rainbows that follow - the many acts of compassion we see springing up globally. When we see people suffering or in need, our first instinct is to reach out and help, to do something that will help to alleviate their pain. Not only do these activities elicit a like response from those who witness them, participating in or acting accordingly is good for our overall well-being. Modeling compassion for our children ensures that they will continue to care for other human beings throughout their lifetime and for generations to come.

Empathy and compassion are uniquely human strengths. We are pre-wired to care for our young, and through practice we can develop and strengthen our compassion for others. Research in the science of emotions suggests that practicing compassion actually increases our resilience by strengthening our resources to navigate challenges and overcome obstacles. When we help others who are suffering, we spread warm feelings to others, and help them feel cared for, loved, and more hopeful.

Many people are suffering in various ways during these challenging and uncertain times. Whether struggling with health, loss of loved ones, financial stresses, increasing levels of anxiety and depression, or just shifting our daily routines, we all are grieving the loss of the "normal" life we used to know and building our resilience to create and adapt to a new "normal."

Empathy has no script. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of 'You're not alone'.

Brené Brown



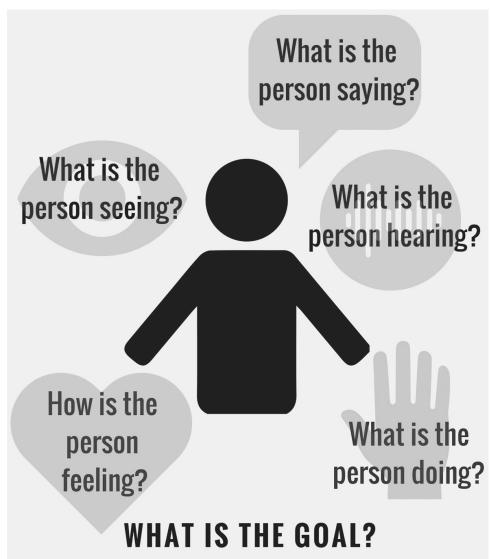


TIP: IMAGINE YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW

When we see the world through our children's eyes we can appreciate how they perceive what is going on around them: for example, "doing school" from home, parents home more often, not being able to have their usual play dates with friends and not seeing relatives who are part of their family's life. When we put ourselves in our children's shoes, we can imagine how they must feel, whether it might be confusion, or sadness, or frustration, or anger.

Empathy doesn't call for us to feel sorry for others - that's sympathy. It merely asks us to understand and appreciate what another person is experiencing.

TRY THIS:USE EMPATHY MAPPING TO APPRECIATE THEIR PERSPECTIVE



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ASK YOURSELF

- What is my child/teen saying?
- What are they hearing?
- What are they seeing?
- How are they feeling?
- What are they doing?

As schools continue to adapt to regional regulations it's especially important for us to understand what's on our children's and teen's minds and what's in their hearts - their concerns and worries, what they are feeling, what they believe they need to feel comfortable going back to school and adjusting to a new normal. They will be facing new rules at school than those they are used to. For example, they will probably need to keep a safe physical distance from others, wear a face mask, eat lunch in their classroom, play and socialize in small groups, etc.



As parents, we will want to understand what our children and teens have heard about the virus and how they understand the information. Where did they learn about COVID-19 and from whom? We may need to clarify the facts and science behind what they might have heard from news sources, social media, and friends. To prepare for the transition back to the school building, it is important to try to talk to them about the new expectations that the teachers, principal, administrators and school leaders will have for them. How do they feel about these new rules and shifting expectations for their behavior?

For the students who are continuing to learn remotely, consider how they might feel. We have heard that some students thrive academically through online classes and others don't. What is your child's experience? For those who are schooling part-time in a physical classroom, and part-time from home, how do they feel about the transition to this new routine? Are they confused or worried about what comes next?



WHY IT WORKS: EMPATHY FUELS CONNECTION

Practicing empathy deepens our understanding of others and fuels connection. "Tuning into" our children's experience can help us get "on the same wavelength." Building stronger, healthier, and more positive relationships with our kids and teens are always good for everyone involved, especially in 2020.



TIP: PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Being kind to oneself, treating oneself with care by taking time out of the day to relax, go for a jog, or take an art class is not being selfish. It is taking the time you need to reset, restore, and rejuvenate. We all need to do that in order to be able to properly care for the people in our lives.

As they teach us when we board a plane, in the event of an emergency, you must put the oxygen mask on first before you put one on your child. You cannot care for your loved ones if you are not well yourself. We can be hard on ourselves, listening far too much to our inner critic: what we should have, could have done, what we can't do, how others have done things better, and on it goes. Mute that critic. Tell it to take a hike and start appreciating what you did do, what you can do, and what you intend to do that will be good for you and those that matter to you. When you care for yourself the benefits are many; you will look, feel, and do things so much better, you are showing others how you wish to be treated, and you are teaching your children how they can care for themselves and how they can help care for other people.

TRY THIS: MODEL COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

There are numerous ways to model compassion for others. When you take care of the needs of your children, your pets, the elderly and the frail, or even caring for flowers and plants in your home or garden, it is an act of compassion, as they are not fully capable of providing that basic care for themselves.

Lending a hand to co-workers, employees, or your boss is a sign of compassion and respect. Reaching out to help at homeless shelters, church or charity events are all acts of kindness and care. When a catastrophe strikes, such as the disastrous hurricanes, motor vehicle accidents, fires, major illness, events such as 911, and now with COVID 19, people spring into action and perform a multitude of actions that are meant to help those who suffer from the event: fundraising pages, bake sales and other fundraising events. People will deliver meals, offer transportation, run errands or create fun activities to bring connection.

A few very simple and easy things individuals can do are to send messages and notes to friends and relatives or even to people they may not really know, like to the elderly in a nursing home or a message through social media that will just lift the spirits of the reader. Another is to wear a mask when out in public to help protect those we come in contact with from spreading the COVID virus. There is no limit to the imagination when people feel that drive to support each other and offer comfort.

WHY IT WORKS: COMPASSION IS CONTAGIOUS

Did you ever notice when one person shares an idea, seeks help in making that idea a reality or invites others to help with an idea that will benefit someone who is hurting, that soon many others have joined in to help make that idea a reality? Or perhaps you have experienced walking into a room where a group have just received some bad news---the energy in the room is almost palpable.

There have been many studies showing that emotions are contagious. Just like smiling at someone seems to trigger a smile back, compassion is also 'caught'.

In schools we see compassion as something to be "caught, saught, and taught" indicating that in addition to teaching compassion, adults can look for opportunities to point out compassionate acts children have participated in and they can seek out opportunites to model compassion. At home try to see how many compassionate acts you can share from news stories or from your community during times where so much of the news can feel heavy.



When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'

Fred Rogers



STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

I could be a better model for my son when it comes to self-compassion. We don't realize how much our children learn from how we deal with stress. He can be very hard on himself. Now I ask him what he heard and saw. I've realized that he's often reading into my facial expressions. Using this tip of emotion mapping has helped me get a better understanding of what causes my son to feel upset. It has also opened up a conversation between my husband and me about what our faces look like and our voices sound like when we communicate.

MENTAL FITNESS

On returning to school after this period of disruption there is no doubt that it will look and feel quite different from anything that you and your child has experienced before. Class sizes, timetables, movements around the school site and the increasing partnership between home and school will make this new 'normal' anything but.

They may be in classrooms altered to accommodate health guidelines or at home with online classes or a combination of both. There may be some apprehension mixed with the excitement of seeing friends and teachers again, as well as a desire to settle into a familiar school routine. These shifts in patterns and processes will, inevitably, create varying levels of anxiety for all. Parents may well find their child's (and their own) emotions and moods bouncing up and down on a daily basis (even more than usual), especially as the first day of school approaches and during the first month as they adjust to the inevitable and consistent changes. By having an understanding of some core principles of behavioral science and a few tips on how to see the signals and what to do to manage them will make this return to school more manageable.

Behavioral sciences have a great deal to offer us in these times in the form of frameworks that can help us notice where someone is showing signs of stress. Once we have awareness of the behavior being presented we can then navigate our way, with those involved, to recognize that emotion and take the appropriate action necessary to transform and transcend a potentially harmful situation into one of learning, understanding and creativity.





TIP: FAMILY CHECK-IN

Adopt a family practice of checking in on each other's feelings two or three times a week. Suggest to family members that they rate their emotional state on a scale of one to ten, with ten being very happy and one feeling very low. This will help to stay in tune with any potential issues that may arise

.

TRY THIS: CONNECT THE NUMBER TO BEHAVIOR

Try this activity to help develop an awareness of how feelings can affect behavior. Point to how they are acting and then connect the actions to a number. For example, if they seem really happy, suggest they might be an eight. See if they agree. Or if they don't want to talk to anyone, ask if they are a two or three.

Listen for your child's average number to understand how they're interpreting the scale. If it goes up or down, ask about the change. You can also ask what they think could make the number go up. If you are having a rough day, share your number with your children as a way of modeling conversation about emotions.



Helping your child to become more aware of their emotions and connecting those emotions to the thoughts behind them allows both of you to then address the thoughts themselves and begin to ask questions around the thoughts and feelings. Whether you are focusing on the body, mind, heart or soul the fact that you are creating space for your child to be heard will always be of value. There is nothing more reassuring for a child to be in the presence of an adult that is genuinely interested in them.

WHY IT WORKS: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Recognizing your emotional temperature, as you and your child are doing with the happiness scale, is a crucial part of being able to express oneself in a healthy manner, as well as being helpful for conflict resolution. A study conducted by UCLA professor of psychology Matthew D. Lieberman found that naming and sharing emotions with trusted others helps kids develop emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is linked to success and resilience.



TIP: MINDSET CHECK-IN

Another good family practice is to check in regularly on the mindset beneath our thoughts. The average person will have upwards of 60,000 thoughts per day with approximately 80% of them being negative. Taking time out of the day to become aware of those thoughts is helpful. Determine which are positive and self-affirming and which are negative and Self-Deprecating. This will not only help us to shift into an emotionally good place, but will also help to overcome the struggles and difficulties we are facing.

Identifying and adopting what is termed a **Fixed Mindset** develops from quick, knee-jerk responses in the form of thoughts that are blame-focused, pessimistic, negative, victim and loser-oriented, depressed, hopeless, and helpless. Fixed mindsets often include questions and statements like;

•	"What	is	wrong	with	me?'
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- "I'm bad at ."
- "Online school is boring."
- "They don't know what they are talking about"
- "They're so clueless and annoying"

This mindset will lead an individual on a downward spiral of emotions and possibly to being stuck in a pit of negativity, depression, and despair. The most severe of which would result in behaviors such as, prolonged periods of depressed moods, irritability, drug and alcohol use. Please refer to the tip, "How to Recognize Mental Health Emergencies" on ResilienceNowforParents.org should your child begin to display prolonged periods of negativity and/or depressed moods.

On the other hand, adopting and developing what is termed a **Growth Mindset** helps individuals to become more is open-minded, optimistic, growth-oriented, hopeful, happy, and forward-moving. Growth mindsets tend to ask questions and make statements like:

- "How can I see this in a different light?"
- "I am learning to use the online learning platform."
- "I really like how he/she is good at..."
- "I wonder what he/she is thinking, feeling, or wanting?"
- "Who can help me learn to _____?"
- "I can't do that yet."

TRY THIS:

Family members can help each other identify their Fixed and Growth mindsets by listening to the words used. To support each other in developing a Growth mindset, make a practice of praising each other's efforts in a given task, rather than the ability to accomplish the task. Watch for limiting words like **always**, **never**, **everything** and **everybody**.

WHY IT WORKS: PRIMES SUCCESSFUL THINKING

Based on the research by Stanford University's Dr. Carol Dweck, we know that people who have a Growth Mindset have:

- A greater desire to learn
- Greater ability to embrace challenges
- More persistence when mastering new material even when faced with adversity
- A stronger ability to learn from mistakes
- An openness to constructive criticism
- Increased resilience (which is more crucial than ever during these challenging times)



WITH YOUR KIDS: SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE TO GET THE CONVERSATION FLOWING

When using a **Growth Mindset**, you are more likely to be open to learning.

When using a **Fixed Mindset** you are more likely to be judging. Helping your children to recognize when they are being **The Judger** or **The Learner** helps them to recognize their own barriers to learning. If they make statements like:

"I can't read" or "I am terrible at calculus" ask them:

- Does that sound like The Judger or The Learner?
 If your child identifies Judger thoughts, ask them to write them out on paper, then challenge them to flip the statements and/or questions to Learner
- Ask your child to identify the emotions they are feeling once they
 complete this exercise. Their level of positive emotions should
 increase and open up space for creative resolutions and
 exploration.

STORIES FROM THE REAL WORLD:

Being quite the little perfectionist, my 11-year-old son weighs himself down with a lot of 'should-s'. He judges himself and his emotions, often saying things like "I should be happy, I shouldn't be a worrier".

These moments had always been challenging for me and his father. It seemed no matter what we said to comfort him, it would somehow make things worse.

Teaching him the concept of "learner versus judger" helped us to get out of this negative cycle and empowered our son to use his own positive self-talk. Now we only need to ask him, "Is that the learner talking?", and most of the time he reroutes his words, and thoughts, back to more solution-focused and self-compassionate. It seemed to help that he was already familiar with the idea of a Growth Mindset from a school lesson on Social-Emotional-Learning.

His father and I have benefited from these strategies as well. We've started doing the Family Check-in with each other a few times a week. I can't believe how long we used to go without asking each other how the other one was doing, "truly doing". But instead of 'should-ing' on ourselves about the past, we're just grateful now to have a little more mindfulness in our marriage.





TIP: WORKING WITH WORRY

Identify unhelpful "What if ... ?" thoughts

Being concerned about something or someone isn't bad - it can be a sign of empathy and compassion - but when these concerns spiral into worry and relentless 'what ifs', it can become unhelpful and keep you from seeing things clearly. The definition of worry is 'mental distress or agitation' about something 'impending or anticipated'. Since worry is focused on things that will happen in the future, it leads to these 'what if...?' thoughts because your mind is trying to solve a problem. What can help is thinking about the future with curiosity and turning those negative 'what if thoughts into positive 'what is' thoughts. From a stable 'what is' you can begin to identify what might be and plan rather than worry. It can also help to consider your locus of control - those things you can control vs. those things that are out of your control. If something is out of your control, don't waste your precious time and energy thinking about it. It's OK to be 'constructively concerned' about many things and people, but you'll only be able to influence a small

For example:

Things In Your Control

Your thoughts
Your words
Your actions (what you eat, wear, do...)

Things Out of Your Control

Will soccer be cancelled?

number of them and will have complete control over just a handful.

The weather
Other people's actions/reactions
COVID impact on health / economy regulations
Who wears/doesn't wear a a mask
If you or a family member will be laid off
If and how school happens

Everything that's out of your control can cause you to worry, but worry is like paying

TRY THIS: TURN 'WHAT IF?' INTO 'WHAT IS!'

the interest before you get the loan.

Reframing is a superpower that turns "what if" into "what is".

Whenever you catch yourself worrying about things you cannot control, turn your "what if" into a list of "what is". Tell a story that empowers you to stop catastrophizing or going straight to the worst case scenario.

See next page for examples.



TRY THIS (CONT'D)

What if - What if school is 100% online and work wants me in the office? How am I going to make that work? I can't manage it and I can't handle it!

What is - The plan for school has not yet been clarified. I don't have control over the planning process. My worry won't change what the school board does. My work has been flexible and accommodating. Even if they want us all back in the office, there are other parents who have young children in school, all facing the same issue. It will work out.

What if - I should never have taken my son to the park last week. He has been coughing and wheezing ever since! What if he caught COVID-19? It's all my fault. I am the worst parent ever. I should have known better and kept him home.

What is - My child has a cough and is wheezing. I will take them to the pediatrician. Long before COVID-19 kids coughed and wheezed. Whatever this is, I am on it.

Once you've gotten the hang of this, share it with your kids and get them to have a go too. Flipping a 'what if' into a solid 'what is' is incredibly grounding and empowering, not to mention practical and actionable!

WHY IT WORKS: STOPS A DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF EMOTIONS

Worry is Misguided Energy.

Fortunately, our brains love patterns and with practice we can shift the path our brains take.

Worry expert Dr. Jos F. Brosschot tells us that in essence, worry consists of attempts at constructive problem-solving, which may become problematic when these attempts persist in the face of apparent lack of success.

In other words, if you keep trying and don't successfully solve whatever the problem is, you're likely to get into the ongoing 'what if' negative thought cycles. Because worry is about something in the future, we can't actually solve it in the moment.

Shifting your focus to what is and identifying what practical steps you can take helps you to feel empowered and gets your energy, attention and clarity back on track! As Charles Swindoll said: "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it".

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!

We hope that you have found this eBook helpful in working through some of the issues you have been dealing with in preparing your children and teens to go back to school well. We recognize that as you navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it brings, you will continue to have questions and concerns about your child's wellbeing.

And as circumstances change, some of those questions will be new and not addressed in this eBook. It is our intention to continue to offer tips and open dialogue for parents and educators to support all of our children's and teen's educational experiences throughout the coming year, whether or not they are learning at home, inside a school building, or a combination of both.

We invite you to join our Facebook group, Resilience Now for Parents, where we post our tips and field comments and questions. Also on that page, we are continuing to host Facebook Live events with members of our Collective of Positive Psychologists, educators, and others whose expertise might help.

Please also visit our website, ResilienceNowforParents.org, on a regular basis. All of our tips are archived and updated on that site, along with a rich array of resources to support you. If you would like to contact any member of our Resilience Now for Parents experts individually, please click through to their respective logo featured on our website. We are here to help.

We wish everyone all the best for whole-being wellness throughout this school year and beyond.

We are in this together.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING WHETHER AND HOW YOUR CHILD RETURNS TO SCHOOL IN-PERSON

As positive psychologists and educators, and as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles ourselves, we know how difficult it is to figure out what is best for our children and our families with respect to schooling during this coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Because we all want our families to be physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe, as well as to thrive socially and academically, there are many questions to consider when deciding whether, when and how our kids resume their education inside a school building. We are aware that there are many factors that go into consideration, and there is no right answer for every child, every family, or any situation. Many parents, due to their own need to work and earn a living, or lack of child care options, have no choice but to send their child or teen back to school whenever and however their brick and mortar school building reopens. Some will have to decide between distance, or online learning and in-person school. Others will be offered the choice to have a combination of both in-person and virtual learning, sometimes called hybrid learning. Still others will choose to homeschool their children.

TRANSPORTATION

- How will my child get to and from school?
- If they will be taking the bus, how many students will be on that bus?
- What protocols are in place for that bus ride to and from school?

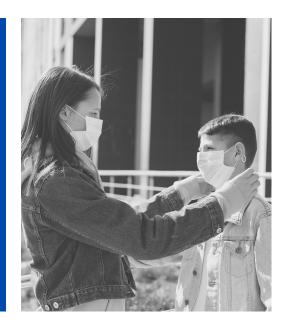
SCHOOL LOGISTICS

- How many students will be in each classroom at one time?
- Will those students be the same all day everyday?
- How many teachers will my children interact with?
- How will students enter and exit the school building?
- How will classroom desks be arranged?
- Where will students eat lunch?
- Will there be recess, and if so, for how long and where?
- Will the technology/internet access necessary for virtual/remote learning be provided by the school?
- Will there be tuition discounts?



SCHEDULING

- Will my child/teen be required to attend school every day?
- Will in-person classes be available to my child every day on a full schedule?
- What will the home learning schedule be?
- Will it follow the in-person schedule?
- Will all of the schools in my district (for example lower/elementary school, middle school, upper/high school) be scheduled on the same days and times?



HEALTH & SAFETY PROTOCOLS

- Will a school nurse be inside the school building?
- If so, what are protocols and policies for visiting the nurse?
- Will all students be required to wear face masks?
- Will all teachers, administrators and staff be required to wear face masks?
- How will those rules and requirements be enforced?
- Will there be temperature checks? By whom? When?
- Will classrooms be sanitized? How? How often?
- Will hand sanitizer be available for all students? Soap and sinks?
- Will COVID-19 tests be available at school? How will results be communicated and kept private?
- If not at school, where will testing be available? Who will pay for those tests?
- Will teachers, administrators, and school staff be tested on a regular basis? How often?
- What protocols are in place if someone tests positive?
- Will our school have an isolation room for infected students? For teachers or staff?
- What are the criteria for closing the school building due to infection spread?
- If a teacher becomes infected, how long will they have to quarantine? Who will substitute for that teacher? What measures will be taken to protect the substitute teacher from infection or from spreading the virus?

HEALTH VULNERABILITIES

- What health challenges or vulnerabilities does my child have that might put them at greater risk of infection?
- Will there be special dispensation for them at school?
- Are there others in my household whose vulnerabilites should be considered? (auto-immune, respiratory issues, etc.)



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- How is my child/teen's school handling social interactions among students?
- Will students be able to interact with friends or assigned by the school to social groups?
- How does my child/teen handle changes?
- What has my child said (in words or behaviors) about how safe they feel about going back to school?
- Has my child/teen expressed fears, trepidation or hesitation about going back to inperson school?
- Is my child/teen's school providing counseling to assist with students' transition back to school? With their fears and/or emotional well-being?
- Are there psychological resources that you can take advantage of if you or your family is in need of support?
- Whom might you contact at school with any questions or concerns about your child's/teen's emotional well being?

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Will my child/teen catch up academically?
- If I choose a virtual school only option will my child/teen's learning and academic advancement suffer?
- Will my child/teen's special learning needs be accommodated if I choose to keep them out of the school building? How?
- How has my child/teen done with previous virtual/online schooling?
- Will all students be graded using the same criteria and standards regardless of their mode of learning -- virtual versus in-person classes?





Affecting Behavior Change Inc.











Marge Schiller, PhD

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
LEADNING BARTNER











