
Helpful Hints for Families and Couples

Helpful hints for families and couples who shelter in place during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

1. Shelter in place can be very stressful. Couples spend more time together than usual. In families, when children and adolescents are at home, normal routines no longer exist. Television and other social media have ongoing information, statistics about the number of people infected and those that have died can be overwhelming, as it is ongoing. In addition, closing schools, restaurants, etc. and social distancing are required to decrease the spread of the Coronavirus. This can be very stressful for couples and families. It is important that couples and families establish new routines as they are shelter in place, such as when to get up, eating meals together, working from home (designated times, quiet and designated work space), school work online or home schooling, designated time to use social media in families that have limited devices, etc. Couples/families should talk through these things, and reassess every few days, making changes as needed. It is important that individuals have some alone time just to attend to their own needs and feelings, as well as couple time (to talk, have a cup of tea or coffee, talk about their worries and uncertainty, but also reminisce about the past positive memories and make plans for the future) and family time (play a board game, do a puzzle, watch a movie together, etc.). Include family members that are not shelter in place with you in these activities through social media. Be respectful of these designated (individual, couple, family) times as it will help you cope better with the pandemic.
 2. Living in tight spaces can be stressful and couples that have a history of being conflictual or abusive, this might escalate. Take a time out, each person going to a different part in the home or one going for a walk (if it is safe), keeping social distancing. Remember that sheltering at home is stressful and adding this stress to existing couple conflict or abuse can escalate things. If you are in a verbal/emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse situation, contact 1-800-799-safe to get help.
 3. Children might be more needy, as COVID-19 news coverage can create stress for them. They might cry more, be clingier, soil themselves, even though the child had previously outgrown that behavior. Remember that these are normal reactions of the child trying to deal with COVID-19 as they are exposed to media coverage, overhearing adults talking about their fears and worries about loved ones (especially their grandparents and other older family members and family friends). When things return to "normal," the child will return to developmentally appropriate behavior.
 4. People might live in tight spaces, and with children and adults' shelter in place, with little opportunity to leave, and spend alone time, children might regress (see #3) as they react to the stress and uncertainty of COVID-19. Some parents might have difficulties dealing with these stressors and their own worries and fear about the Coronavirus, family members' well-being, and finances. These stressors can lead some parents to be reactionary to their child's behavior and respond disproportionately, being abusive. If you are in a situation in which you are feeling overwhelmed and are getting increasingly agitated with your child, take a time-out, go to another room, ask your child to go to another room, ask your partner to step in and take care of the situation. Go for a walk, maintaining social distancing. Talk to someone if you are a single parent. If you realize you cannot control this level of frustration/anger, get some professional help. There is tele-mental health available in each state. Child abuse needs to be reported, during this time of shelter in place, children are at higher risk of abuse, without mandated reporter stepping in. If you are aware of child abuse contact your local police
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department, the Department of Childs and Family Services, or 1-800-25-Abuse.

5. Stress such as from the COVID-19 pandemic can impact us as we are processing information, especially short-term memory (e.g. recalling things that just happened, reading something and not recalling what you just read, etc.). That is normal in ongoing stressful times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Be kind to yourself and know that this is temporary and will get better as we return to a life without COVID-19. Also remember that your child and teenager might not perform so well in their online schoolwork or home schooling. For students, this means reading might be difficult. Multiple choice tests are not effective during these stressful times.
 6. You, your partner, and child(ren) (young or adolescent) might experience anxiety: tremors and twitching, headache, muscle tension, fatigue, insomnia, pounding heart, sweating, stomach pain, dizziness, shortness of breath, irritability, restlessness, feeling tense and jumpy, trouble concentrating, and feeling apprehensive. Reach out to family and friends through social media. You can also contact a mental health professional to help you cope with the stress. Remember that many counselors today do tele-mental health.
 7. You, your partner, or child (young or adolescent) might experience depression: persistent sadness, feeling of hopelessness, feeling of emptiness, feeling anxious, feeling pessimistic, feeling helpless, feeling worthless, feeling guilty, loss of interest or pleasure that was once important. Reach out to family and friends through social media. You can also contact a mental health professional to help you cope with the stress. Remember many counselors today do tele-mental health. If your depression gets worse and you start feeling suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 or suicidpreventionlifeline.org in addition for veterans and military personal can contact the Veterans/ Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255.
 8. Some people cope with shelter in place and not having contact with others through unhealthy, even self-destructive, behavior, such as excessive drinking, drug use, overeating, etc. Talk with your partner and stay connected with your children and adolescents regularly. You can also contact a counselor or crisis line (Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746) if you feel overwhelmed and anxious.
 9. It is important to do good self-care, individually and as a couple and family, with such things as yoga, getting adequate sleep, exercising, eating regular, healthy meals.
 10. Develop a routine. Just as all of us had a routine before COVID-19, we need to develop a new routine that makes sense during the time we work/stay home. Routines (when to get up in the morning, eating, etc.) are important as they help us have something predictable, but also something we can control and determine.
 11. Create regular times for physical activities (treadmill, walking/walking your dog, etc.). Stay safe, practicing social distancing, and remember that getting fresh air will be helpful (if you are not in quarantine). If you have children, engage them in exercise activities: do a home exercise routine; take turns on the treadmill, do stretching exercises, etc. You can also use social media and have a walking buddy, or treadmill buddy, etc. Remember that exercising helps develop endorphins, which help us feel better. Playgrounds are okay for children to go to with their parents, but assure social distancing, so no contact sports.
 12. Stay connected, through social media, with family and friends. Allow children and adolescents to connect with their friends through social media. As a couple you can stay connected with family and friends through social media, share a meal with family or another couple or friends, have regular check in times, to be engaged. Think of other creative ways to connect with others through social media.
 13. Limit the amount of COVID-19 news. TV and other media coverage exposure can become very overwhelming, especially if we do not have the ability to talk about it. Watching the repeated information for many hours about the rate of COVID-19 infections rising in this country and around the globe, just like the increase of deaths resulting from COVID-19 nationally and internationally can create anxiety and stress. Some people might even experience Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). Therefore limit your exposure and talk with others about what you are seeing, and/or worries you might have.
 - If you are having difficulties coping with what you see or hear and are dealing with sadness, depression, anxiety (worried about getting sick,
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or loved ones getting sick), sleeping and eating problems, unable to take care of essential responsibilities, sadness crying often, isolating by not using social media to stay connected, headaches, stomach pain, listless and not enjoying things any longer than in the past, hopeless for the future, depressed, suicidal (financial stress, fear of getting sick, isolation, loss of loved ones, etc.) contact a mental health professional. If you are suicidal, contact a local suicide hotline, 911 or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 or suicidepreventionlifeline.org Veterans/Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255.

14. If you have children, remember that it is essential to limit their exposure to information about COVID-19. It is also important to talk with your child about what they see and hear.
 - Children might be very worried that you, a grandparent, they themselves, siblings or other important people in their lives might get ill, or worse, die.
 - Talk with your children to see if they have any questions and answer them age appropriately.
 - If your child(ren) do not have questions, do not pressure them, as that might create anxiety for the child.
 - Just answer the questions the child is asking. You do not need to provide more info. If children know you are okay with answering questions, they will ask. If they think it is upsetting to you, they might not.
 - Remember that children's language is play, so they might play out their fear. Create a safe space for them, as this will allow them to work through their fears and worries. Their play might be about people getting sick, it might also be repetitive, which is okay and just the child's way of working through it.
 - Remember your child might feel very overwhelmed about all the news and social media coverage about COVID-19. Reach out to a professional if you see your child crying more often, regressing (engaging in behavior that they have developmentally outgrown, such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, etc.), worries and sadness, sleep and eating issues, irritability, attention and concentration problems, report having headaches and stomach aches, things that the child enjoyed in the past are no

longer something the child wants to engage in, increased acting out behavior. Role model for your child, limiting your exposure to media coverage about COVID-19. Be positive. Do not talk with your child about your worries (find another adult to talk to). Create routines and a schedule that makes life more predictable for your child. Assure adequate rest, exercise and regular meals. Provide more hugs and reassurance. Plan a fun activity each day (drawing together, playing a board game, do a puzzle together, read together, play music together, etc.). If you are worried about your child's behavior and want some professional help, reach out to a mental health professional. For young children, look for a play therapist.

15. Remember that developmentally, adolescents want to connect to their peers for support. They can do that through social media. That is an age appropriate behavior. Be sure to check in with your adolescent and talk about what they hear and see about COVID-19. This is also a way to assure that they are not overwhelmed, feel anxious or depressed. They might be more withdrawn, report headaches and stomach pain, not interested in engaging in meals and other family activities, isolate in their room. They might behave in unhealthy behavior such as drinking, smoking, over or under eating, etc. Talk with your adolescent. You can also reach out to a mental health professional. Some offer tele-mental health.
16. If you can, connect to elderly family members via social media. Being connected can help them to not be isolated and helps you to know that they are okay. You can also drink a cup of coffee/tea or eat a meal together via social media and use that time to chat.
17. It is always helpful for couples and families to talk about their feelings related to COVID-19. Parents should share their feelings and worries with other adults – not with their children or adolescents, as they might feel that they cannot talk with their parents about what they feel or are worried about.
18. It is important to focus on positive things as a couple and family. You can write down plans for the future or have children draw their plans, like playing with their friends, seeing their grandparents, or an upcoming birthday party.