

about

parenting in a pandemic

SOME

HELPING YOU BE PRODUCTIVE & WELL
JEANNINE JANNOT, PH.D.

Thoughts

Parenting is hard. Parenting in a pandemic is super hard! There is no parenting handbook for how to jump in and make it all better. And, because it is continuing to impact our daily lives far longer than we had hoped and anticipated, everyone is struggling to effectively manage and adapt to our new “normal”.

Our instinct as a parent is to protect our children above all else. And, make no mistake, our kids need us right now. Events that turn the world upside down for all members in a family or wider community are relatively rare occurrences and would be considered a shared trauma. Let's call the pandemic what it is for most of us – a **traumatic** experience.

Like any other trauma, so much lies outside of our personal **control**. It is stressful and heartbreaking for parents to feel unprepared or unable to help their children during a time that none of us could have predicted or prepared for. But there is some good news – there is literally **one thing** that you can do as a parent that is within your control and will be the most powerful and helpful gift you can give your child during this or any other stressful time – your **warmth** and **support**. Decades of research tells us that a child under stress who has at least one caring adult- who consistently offers *love, acceptance, and consistency* – will feel safe and secure. This is **key** for a child to manage their own stress in a way that develops their resiliency in the face of challenges rather than paralyzes them into helplessness.

This requires parents to shift gears out of our reactionary problem-solving mode. Our best parenting right now will be less impacted by what we tell our kids to do and more by what we **model** for them. That means working through how to be flexible and adaptable to constantly changing circumstances. It means recognizing and appropriately expressing our feelings. It involves communication and collaboration that entails more listening than talking. It requires monitoring our self-care and habits around what we are eating and drinking, how much we are moving (exercise) and sleeping, our screen usage, and the ways we manage our stress.

This is hard – super hard. Part of this journey is to show yourself and your children that **you can do hard things**. You can struggle, make mistakes, but you keep trying and keep growing.

Help and support

Showing up for our children in a way that is **warm** and **supportive** may sound simple and easy, but often our best intentions are derailed when we are feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

- Help children to **name** their emotions to **tame** their emotions. Get granular here - are they angry or is frustrated or disappointed a more accurate label of the feeling?
- Consider your **expectations** for your child. Are they realistic for the current situation? Discuss as a family what your expectations are and why. Ask for and listen to your child's feedback.
- Build your family's structure and **routine** around your expectations to support everyone's success. Routines establish a sense of control and safety that is critical in times of uncertainty.
- Make an effort to facilitate and practice positive **communication** and collaboration. Try listening to understand and not problem-solve. Be empathetic by trying to understand the concern from your child's perspective.