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## STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR DEALING WITH CHILDREN DURING THE PANDEMIC

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For those with children the following may be helpful:

- *Acknowledge where they are at – emotionally and intellectually.*

Children are extremely perceptive. They are taking in information from many sources – on-line, social media, friends, and you. All this informational input, combined with the disruptions to their life normalcy, is impacting them. They may be exhibiting different types of reactions, perhaps ones that you're not accustomed to seeing. Identify where they are at and work from there.
- *Let them express their emotions, perceptions, positives, and fears.*

Children of all ages have been impacted by this pandemic. Many are struggling to adapt to this "new normal" of their life. It is not uncommon as parents and concerned adults to want to help them through this time. It is important to let them share their reactions to this and to normalize what is normal. A common mistake is to tell them to "get over it" or "you shouldn't feel that way". Let them experience this in the way that they need to as long as it is done safely.
- *Communicate at their level.*

Children of all ages will have their own perspective on what is going on. Some may not vocalize their anxiety but it will show in their behaviors. It is not uncommon to see a child's behavior regress to an earlier age. Understand that this normal and listen.
- *Provide structure*

Just as in for adults, it is important for children to be in a structured environment. Set a daily schedule for them if they are at home and adhere to it. Home schooling may be part of the plan for you. Also plan fun time for them and with them. Asking them to sit all day in front of a phone/tablet/computer screen is not the solution. Let them go outside and burn off energy (following social distancing guidelines).

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- *Be flexible*  
Just as plans can change children can shift intellectually and emotionally fairly quickly. Be prepared for this and understand that this is normal. If you remain too rigid it will create stress for all of you that may be otherwise avoided.
- *Manage your own stress*  
Children are very perceptive to emotions. You may be experiencing your own anxieties about this and have not said anything thus you believe the kids will not know. Kids tend to intuit what others are feeling without anything being said. Managing your own stress will go a long way to assisting your children in managing theirs.
- *Engage them in problem solving*  
Whenever you can get your child's input into solving issues that may arise. While different ages will come at this from different perspectives, feeling that they have some control in their own lives will help them through this. Obviously as the adult caretaker the final decisions are yours, allowing a child to feel that their idea was incorporated into the solution is important. Find areas where you can allow for this type of input.
- *Ensure proper sleep and nutrition.*  
A sleep schedule and maintaining proper nutrition is very important for children. They may be experiencing an abundance of energy and find it hard to fall asleep and thus want to stay up late wanting to watch TV or chat with friends on their social platforms. They may also want to tend to snack more, perhaps out of boredom. While some bending of rules can be helpful, it is important to not stray too far from their norms.
- *Find ways for them to have fun.*  
These times are stressful for children. Their life has been disrupted. For many reasons it is important for them to have fun. Psychologically, they need the balance to current life stressors and it will help build a sense of optimism. Physiologically, having fun will help them keep their immune systems at an optimal level. Having fun together with you can also help to strengthen the bonds between you and your relationship overall.
- *Use this time in a positive way*  
Look at this time as an opportunity to spend more time with your children. In today's fast-paced world we often don't get this chance. Enjoy it!