

We are living in a different and unprecedented time. Working from home. Shelter in place. At-home and online learning. Our social and emotional skills are being tested ways they have not before. Currently, and really always, parents and primary caregivers are the first teachers of social and emotional lessons to children. Here are some research-based strategies for those supporting the varied emotions—stress, anxiety, restlessness—of kids and the adults caring for them. The goal is to equip parents/caregivers to help children understand, label, express, recognize, and regulate their emotions—and to build these skills in ourselves as well.

1. **Provide structure and routine.** Write out your schedule for the day with your child. Include time for structured routines (learning tasks) and open-ended play (creative time). Allow for appropriate choices when possible, can learning be done outside? Can you write with markers or crayons? Can you read out loud to you child? Be sure to allow for flexibility when stress arises, schedules can provide guidance, but trust yourself to read the emotions of the day.
2. **Label feelings.** Work to be an *emotional scientist* not an *emotional judge*. Talk to kids about what you are feeling and ask them what they are feeling, be curious about feelings and know that they are temporal. Different people have different feelings and reactions to the same events, and these can and will change throughout the day. Research tells us that we can help to regulate our emotions by identifying them. When we can put our feelings into words, it becomes easier to manage them. Reading books or using media can help to facilitate conversations about emotions (<https://www.imagineneighborhood.org/>).
3. **Acknowledge what you can and cannot control.** We do not have control over some things: the weather, how long school is closed, or who we can interact with. Rather, focus on the things you do have control over: how we act, what we say, what we do, and how we respond to others. Write these down as a

family or individually with your child when there are no big emotions. Revisit this list frequently and reference the list in conversation when overwhelm starts to creep in.

4. **When emotions rise, limit what you say** (less words) and find ways for kids to express anger safely (rip paper, squish playdough, do wall pushups, jump on a trampoline, do jumping jacks, run around the house). Then model how to return to calm (soft voice, go below eye level, model deep breathing, provide rhythmic, repetitive movement—swinging, rocking).
5. **Make a plan** for what you can do with hard feelings/problems:
 - Identify the Problem: I miss school.
 - Generate Ideas to solve the problem: FaceTime with friends or a teacher, do some familiar school activities, hold a virtual book club, draw a picture to send to a friend
 - Select one or more of the ideas and then do them!
6. **PLAY.** Play helps our brains to rest and solve problems. By engaging in something distracting, we move from our *doing brain* into our *thinking brain*, releasing emotions and getting back to the more rational part of the brain.
7. **Move!** Movement also releases positive hormones that help naturally improve our state of mind. Stretch, dance, go for a walk, do GoNoodle, or wrestle. Plan to get outside at least once a day for an extended period of time. Count the number of birds you hear, collect as many pinecones as you can, keep track of your steps, or have your own family/friends exercise challenge.
8. **Develop personal or family mantras.** This can be related to the newness we are all experiencing in various parts of our lives with a growth mindset:

- “I guess I just haven’t learned how to do that yet!”
- “I can do hard things!”

Speak God’s words over your kids and loved ones through scripture:

- Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”
- Joshua 1:8-9 “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

9. **Practice Gratitude.** There is much research that supports the idea of increasing our awareness of things we are thankful for can improve our psychological health. Write down the things you are grateful for, as a part of family devotions or on your own, to increase empathy and awareness of the good.

10. **Manage your own stress.** Reach out to others to share your worries. Take a walk. Know that your child/children will benefit from your psychological and physiological health. Pay attention to what you are feeling. Sleep. Eat. Move. Manage your thoughts. Do things you enjoy.

- Daily Quarantine Questions (taken from the Greater Good Science Center)
 - What am I GRATEFUL for today?
 - Who am I CHECKING IN ON or CONNECTING WITH today?
 - What expectations of “normal” am I LETTING GO OF today?
 - How am I GETTING OUTSIDE today?
 - How am I MOVING MY BODY today?
 - What BEAUTY am I either creating, cultivation, or inviting in today?

Portions adapted from: <https://copingskillsforkids.com/coping-with-coronavirus>