

Seven pandemic survival tips for parents of young children
Dr. Mary Manz Simon

Teachers are among the heroes in the current pandemic.

They have done an amazing job of maintaining contact with families, providing an alternate delivery system for learning and assuring parents “we are there for you.” An abundance of online resources offer ideas to help children continue learning and reduce the anxiety and stress in families. Many of these excellent activities target school age students.

The pandemic has even disrupted normal routines for young children. As their child’s first teacher, parents can adapt these seven early childhood teaching tips to increase effectiveness and reduce stress during these challenging times:

1. Grab the peanut butter.

Young children are concrete thinkers. That means they understand what they can see and touch and taste.

Unless your child has heard media reports of hoarding and seen rows of empty shelves on television, your child probably isn’t as worried as you are about running out of food.

But the next time you open the pantry, casually comment, “We can make a lot of sandwiches with all that peanut butter.” Or, when you’re scooping ice cream, ask, “How many cones do you think we can get out of this container?”

Without mentioning any potential problems, these comments offer unspoken assurance for your child: “You are safe. I am doing many things to take care of you.”

2. Celebrate naptime.

Routines give a child (and us!) a sense of security.

Serve lunch at the time your child normally eats. Put your child down for his regular nap. (You have permission to nap, too!)

Even though your continual presence at home throughout the day might reflect a “new normal”, a preschooler must still pick up his toys. Although your kitchen table might function as your office now, a child still must drop dirty clothes in the hamper.

When life is disrupted, rituals remind us all of what stays the same.

3. Practice “Follow the leader.”

A young child won't care about the latest patient statistics in Lee County, he only wants to stuff grass into a plastic egg!

Don't expect a young child to be worried or anxious about what is happening globally, nationally or regionally. Even if you feel completely engulfed in the pandemic, respect your child's level of interest in current events.

4. Become a real-time word search.

A young child doesn't have the emotional literacy to accurately describe how he's feeling. For example, a three year old doesn't know the labels or words to distinguish between sadness, anger, frustration and boredom. You know your child: help him match words with feelings.

Apply specific knowledge of your child to help him cope appropriately with emotions.

5. Click "off."

Carefully monitor media.

In the aftermath of 911, we were reminded it is unhealthy for children to repeatedly see or be exposed to potentially frightening or unsettling images. If you're a news junkie, engage privately.

6. Be an "Honest Abe."

Your child might not yet read books, but he's an expert at reading your emotions. Truthfulness is the foundation for the trust you've built with your child.

If your child asks about a television image, answer briefly. Speak to the point. "That machine is helping her breathe. Show me how you breathe all by yourself."

Consider your child's maturity when giving information or answering questions. Honesty does not always require a comprehensive or detailed response.

7. Give up distracted parenting.

Stay grounded in the moment. Disruptions swirl rapidly as responses to the coronavirus continually change. Your child needs you to be totally present. You are his anchor.

Early childhood educator Dr. Mary Manz Simon is an award-winning children's author with total sales of more than three million books. marymanzsimon.com