

CONNECTIONS

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AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



Hello City Employees,

How are you doing?

Similar to all of you, the job we do in the EAP looks a little different than it did 5 months ago. We are assisting employees in new ways and with different stressors. There is more overlap of work stress and life stress in these days of working remotely and there is a different stress and sometimes fear for those working outside the home and with the public. Most of us are on edge.

So, how can our monthly newsletter help? Maybe it can't, but we are going to keep sharing ways to cope, ideas to make work and life better (regardless of a pandemic), information about mental health, and tips for maintaining the level of social connection that feels right for you. Odds are that something here will be somewhat helpful so have a look!

This month we are focusing on Parenting during a Pandemic. Juggling your own work responsibilities with parenting and possibly remote learning for your kids is no easy task. If you are struggling in any way, reach out to the EAP and, if we don't have the answers you need, we will do our best to point you in the right direction. And whether or not you are caring for youngsters, the article this month on setting boundaries is very timely.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

~ The EAP Team

Parenting during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Advice from psychologists on the best ways to cope with the new way of life—and the new stressors—caused by the global health crisis.

For many parents, home in the age of COVID-19 has become the office, the classroom, even the gym. Many parents are struggling to not only keep their children occupied, but also to oversee schooling, even as they telework, grocery shop and perform all the other daily necessities of family life. At the same time, children may be reacting to stress by acting out or regressing to behaviors long outgrown.

To help parents cope, psychologists offer this advice:

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EMOTIONS

It's normal to feel fearful, anxious or stressed now. Discuss your experiences with relatives and friends or share a laugh. If you continue to experience problems, try a telehealth consultation with a mental health professional.

SET BOUNDARIES

Boundaries blur when work and home life occur at the same place, making it more difficult to get things done or disconnect from work. To help, designate a specific area to work in, ideally a room with a door.

Also designate an area for schoolwork and homework. If you don't have a home office, consider setting up your children's homework space alongside your workspace. That way, you can model how to work productively.

Try setting a kitchen timer for 90 minutes and tell children you'll spend 15 minutes doing something fun with them when the buzzer goes off. When children know the plan, they're less likely to interrupt your work.

Thank your child for allowing you to do your work. Threats, such as loss of screen time, are far less effective.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

It's unrealistic to think you and your children will put in normal hours during this stressful time.

But it's important to maintain a routine, even if children are getting or staying up later than usual. Routines help family members cope with stress and be more resilient. Post a written schedule of when you expect children to get up, do schoolwork, eat meals, play and go to bed. Also include times dedicated to your own work.

APA.ORG/COVID-19

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION APRIL 2020



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Remember not every hour needs to be scheduled. Allow for flexibility, play and free time.

RELAX SCREEN TIME RULES

Don't feel guilty about allowing more screen time than usual. You might allow your child to watch a movie or play a video game while you complete a work task, for example. Or help your child stay connected to friends via videoconferencing or multi-player video games.

Don't forego the rules entirely. Younger children should use a computer or tablet in common spaces rather than their rooms so that parents can monitor content. With teens, talk about appropriate content and screen time limits.

COMMUNICATE WITH SUPERVISORS AND CO-WORKERS

Explain your situation to your supervisor and colleagues. They may be unaware you're juggling work and home-schooling.

Negotiate with your boss about schedules and expectations. Work together to craft a plan that works for both you and your employer. Perhaps you can agree that you'll focus on home-schooling in the morning but be available for calls in the afternoon, for instance.

SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES

If there's another parent or caregiver in your home, negotiate child-care shifts. You might oversee schoolwork in the morning while your partner works, then trade off in the afternoon.

Get help from people beyond your home, too. Ask a grandparent or friend to video-chat with your child while you make an important work call, for example. Or trade off organizing virtual play dates with a neighbor, which can not only keep your children busy while you work but help them maintain friendships.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

You—and everyone else in your family—need alone time every day. Take a walk, enjoy a long shower or just sit in your car. If you can't get away physically, put in earbuds and practice mindfulness meditation via your phone.

And practice self-compassion. Don't worry if you can't concentrate or let housekeeping standards slide. During this stressful time, it's important to go easy on your children and yourself.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

APA's Psychology Help Center
[apa.org/helpcenter](https://www.apa.org/helpcenter)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Parents and Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019
bit.ly/2KCCLK9

Thanks to Tammy Allen, PhD, Paul Donahue, PhD, Robin Gurwitch, PhD, and Randy Simon, PhD, for help with this fact sheet.

Parenting in a Pandemic

Whether your kids will be attending classes in person this fall or will be spending some or all of their class time remotely, they will still be impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis and it will still be a while before life returns to "normal." For more tips on easing fears and maintaining routines through this period of uncertainty, read the American Academy of Pediatrics' [Tips to Keep the Calm at Home](#) at [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org). This content is available to read or listen to in English or Spanish.

Are You Crisis Schooling? Daily Schedule Advice for ADHD Families

By Sharon Saline, Psy.D., [ADDitude](#) (Reprinted with permission from ADDitude)

A daily schedule comforts and guides children with ADHD through uncertain times like these. Use this expert advice to keep your child happily learning and achieving goals while also social distancing and working from home and banding together as a family.

A petrifying pandemic is changing our lives by the moment, but one constant is true: You're unsure how to manage several weeks of closed schools and social isolation with your children, who happen to have ADHD.

The big questions are: What can you do to set up a family plan that fosters more cooperation and less arguing during these unsettling times? How can you devise a plan that you can actually follow and your kids will buy into? We know that kids with ADHD benefit from structure, but what can you realistically pull off? Here is some helpful advice to get you started.

Carve Out Chunks of Time

Break the day into chunks that include periods for learning, chores, activities, your own work-from-home responsibilities, and personal breaks from each other. Instead of using punishments or threats to force your kids to cooperate, focus on using earned privileges because incentives motivate kids with ADHD best.

Focus on Big Goals and Forget the Small Stuff

Before you start learning at home, think about what you want for each day and what will help you stay as calm as possible. If you are dysregulated, then your kids will be too. Consider what they have to get done for school and chores, what assists them in working on those tasks and how many breaks they'll need.

Don't Fudge Wake Up and Bed Times

Pick specific times for waking up, getting started on studying and going to bed. Use this [Sample Schedule](#) for a reliable family routine.

Set New Screen Time Limits

Decide how much 'fun' screen time they can have each day as a given and what they can earn through cooperation. It's reasonable to allow your child more time than your usual limits on screens right now, especially if it means they can interact with their friends online. However, make sure to explain to your kids that this is an exception not the new normal.

Collaborate with Your Child

Make a time to talk with your kids about their ideas for organizing their days. Brainstorm together how to co-create a structure that makes sense for everyone. When kids, especially those with ADHD, are included in the process of figuring things out, they are far more likely to cooperate.

Spell Out the Incentives

You'll need to make two lists: one with smaller 'like-to-do' items such as playing with the dog, hearing a story, practicing yoga or movement, or getting a snack and another list of bigger incentives such as extra screen time (surfing the net, gaming or social media); doing a favorite activity with you such as cooking or art projects; playing catch or making music; or even watching a TV show or movie. You'll need to apply these incentives to the 'have-to-do' list that includes tasks like studying, doing chores, and helping out with siblings or household work.

Put the Schedule and Incentives in Writing

Now lay out a sample weekly schedule based on the tips below. Each day should have designated blocks of time geared toward school and learning, household chores, and various fun activities. Once you've got a draft, post it around the house and plan to meet again in 4 days to check in and make necessary adjustments. See [ADDitude's Sample Daily Schedule](#) and other educational resources for elementary school students.

Daily Schedule for School and Learning

1. **Plan to scaffold:** Set up work periods using incentives that matter to your child or teen, timed breaks with appropriate activities, and earned rewards when the period is over or the task is completed. Plan to work alongside your child in what I call Family Work Time. You'll do some of your stuff while they are doing theirs. Plus you'll be there to help them stay on task or answer any possible questions. This sends a message that everyone is taking this plan seriously and it's time to settle down.
2. **Block out realistic work periods:** Ask your son or daughter how long they think they can concentrate before needing a break. Depending on their level of interest and the challenge of the work, this period can last 5 to 20 minutes for elementary school kids. For middle and high school students, it varies between 15 and 45 minutes. Together, decide on the length of their study periods and how many they will need per hour and per day.
3. **Set benchmarks:** Choose incentives for reaching benchmarks, expecting that after an hour your child will need a longer break. This is the opportunity for those 'want-to-dos' like YouTube, social media, gaming, reading, listening to music or exercise. Meanwhile, create 5-minute break times between study periods with a clear list of acceptable activities such as movement, bathroom, snacks, petting the dog, etc.

Daily Schedule for Home Chores

1. **Talk about team effort:** This is a time when everybody needs to chip in. Talk to your kids about coming together for the collective well-being of the family and the reality of having to do more chores because the house will get dirtier than usual since everybody's around.
2. **Choose chores they can tackle:** Keep chores for your kids simple and manageable. If they weren't doing them before, this isn't the time to add something new. Instead, link the completion of their chores to some of the incentives as well. Talk about how many reminders they need and in what form. Prepare to supervise them if necessary and notice when they do what they are asked with positivity.

Daily Schedule for Activities

1. **Prioritize social time:** The advice is clear: stay home and avoid playdates. But kids aren't used to being alone and you may feel that complete avoidance is

not possible. If your child is really struggling with social isolation, arrange for FaceTime sessions or interactive gaming sessions with friends. Focus on being outdoors as a family and making the most of this time without outside obligations.

2. **Create a menu of non-screen choices:** I suggest board games, puzzles, cooking, fun art or science projects, scrapbooking, cards, creating movies, music or books, caring for pets, walking, hiking, yoga, Wii, or biking. Create a garden or make some planters, redecorate a bedroom, or organize your playroom.
3. **Game-ify mundane things:** Let each child pick a family movie for two nights a week and pretend you are going to the movie theatre. Make popcorn or other treats. Set it up like an event. Make lunch as a picnic in your living room instead of at the kitchen table. Have breakfast for dinner. Play dance music while doing the dishes.
4. **Nurture their interests:** This is a great opportunity to cultivate those non-school activities that no one ever seems to have enough time to pursue.
5. **Know that down time is healthy:** Everybody needs and wants time to do whatever they want. Save some screen time allocations for this and let folks chill.

Daily Schedule for Managing Your Own Work

1. **Budget quiet into the schedule:** If you are working from home, decide when you want privacy and allow your kids to have some of their screen time then. This keeps them occupied when you need to work.
2. **Take shifts, if possible:** If you have a partner or a family member who lives with you, try to tag team your work and child coverage. Plan on relieving each other and make arrangements to check in with each other when your kids are asleep.

Whatever routines you create during this unusual time will need tweaking as you go, but that doesn't mean the plan isn't working. If your son or daughter isn't cooperating, work with their desire to avoid conflict and see their struggles as part of their frustration about how life has changed. Expect inevitable meltdowns and make an arrangement for structured time apart to cool off before pivoting to another activity.

Remember that kids are struggling right now and may neither fully understand the severity of the situation nor be able to articulate how they feel. Share relevant facts without scaring them and be careful of what you are saying on the phone to friends and family that's within earshot of your youngster

5 Tips to Encourage Independent Play

By Alice Boyes, Ph.D., *Psychology Today*

Realistic, practical tips for working at home with little kids.

Many parents are struggling to get work done with their kids at home. I've been working from home with my child present since she was born. She's now 4. Here are some strategies, based on both child development and experience, for how to encourage independent play.

1. Don't expect your child to play in a room by themselves.

Kids feel safe when they can access their parent. They're wired to monitor where their parent is at all times.

If you are doing a noisy task in a nearby room and they can hear you, that may be enough to satisfy them that you're close by. If you're working on your computer, you may need to be within their line of sight. Why is this important? When they get the urge to look or listen for you, it will take them out of whatever play they're doing. It'll break their concentration.

I tend to work sitting up in bed on my laptop. Some days my child will sit next to me on the bed, usually coloring or making items out of modeling clay. She often wants to have a part of her body physically touching mine. This might seem really disruptive but it's not.

2. Support your child's passions and let them play their way.

If you want your child to play independently, help them find a type of play they're passionate about.

My child is obsessed with modeling clay. At first, all she could make by herself was water bowls for miniature dogs (guess who made the dogs?). Fast forward a few months and now she makes all sorts of things with clay, all day, every day. She even adds clay elements to store bought toys, like adding clay hair to plastic toys. She then colors in her clay creations with washable markers, rather than baking and painting them like you're supposed to. She gets a lot of her inspiration from this [YouTube channel](#), which she loves and I don't.

Make sure your little one can access the toys and supplies they most like to play with, without having to ask you. Don't restrict them to toys. Allow them to play with (safe) kitchen tools, dress up in real adult clothes, and the like.

3. Allow your child to interrupt you.

This point harks back to the idea that your children need to know you're accessible to them. I generally do two-hour sessions of deep work. My child will interrupt me about four times during that period. However, I find I'm pretty easily able to snap back to focusing. The interruptions are only her wanting to connect with me. For example, tell me a story she forgot to tell me yesterday, ask me to look at what she has made, or tell me how many times she has used the bathroom that morning. If I pay her attention when she interrupts, she goes back to what she was doing after about a minute.

If your attitude is of shooing them away, they'll pick up on that. And, they'll then become more demanding of your attention. It's an evolutionary thing. They will become quite desperate to know you'll be responsive to them. In evolutionary terms, it's dangerous to them if you're not. Instead of feeling annoyed to be interrupted, show that you're happy to see their little face.

Try to avoid shushing them if their voice gets loud while they're immersed in a game or if they start singing loudly. Pick your battles. Sure, that can disrupt your concentration but if you want to get work done, it's still better you don't disrupt theirs.

4. Keep consistent routines and do a special activity afterward.

Since I also do work sessions of the same length, my child now intuitively knows how long that is. When I finish my morning work session, I take her for a swim or bake with her, and she gets my undivided attention for about 40 minutes. She knows to expect that. Kids love routines. They need to know their needs for attention will be met. If you're consistent in delivering that, they'll trust you. They'll know they don't have to fight for your attention.

5. Be adaptable.

In my experience, the idea you need completely uninterrupted focus to be productive is a myth. Find what works for you. One place my child will play independently is in the bath. Obviously, I can't leave her in there alone. There are plenty of times I use our toilet as a seat and work while she is playing with bath toys. This was especially true when she was younger and bath toys were the first sustained independent play she did.

Occasionally, my daughter will call her grandparents on Skype while I'm working.

Some strategies haven't worked for me. For example, I'd like to be able to sit outside and work while my daughter plays in the backyard. In reality, she comes to interrupt me every few minutes. We'll try this again in a few months.

Working at home with kids can be tough, especially if you didn't choose it, and you and your children are unaccustomed to it. Practical strategies that are based on understanding children's [attachment processes](#) can help.

Alice Boyes is the author of two books, [The Anxiety Toolkit](#) and [The Healthy Mind Toolkit](#).

Setting Boundaries During Coronavirus

By Ilene Strauss Cohen, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

A message for people-pleasers.

- "I'm sorry, but I'm not having people over right now."
- "Can you please wear a mask while providing your service?"
- "You were just on vacation. I don't feel comfortable seeing you right now."
- "I've decided to put my child in daycare."
- "I've decided to homeschool my kids."



These are statements we may find ourselves making now that we're living in a world with a pandemic on the loose. They might sound like pretty straightforward statements, but as many people-pleasers know, it's hard to say things to others that may offend them. Pleasers tend to prefer going with the flow and going along with the vast majority. But living in times of a pandemic, all of us have different opinions and ways we like to keep ourselves safe. It might become a huge stressor for you if you have different opinions than some of your family and friends. You may be wondering how you can communicate your thoughts and feelings to others without feeling scared.

The coronavirus pandemic comes with so many new experiences and opportunities to feel stressed out and anxious. It's an especially hard time for people-pleasers, who may find themselves needing to set the proper boundaries to keep themselves safe. Even though it's scary and difficult to set boundaries, especially with strong, tough-minded people, I encourage you to use this time as an opportunity to practice. What better time than a pandemic to learn to keep yourself safe and make YOU a priority? Below are some tips that will get you started:

- 1. Become aware of your boundaries:** Before you begin to set boundaries with others, you need to know what your boundaries actually are. Many people-pleasers are confused about where their boundaries lie and what their own thoughts are about important issues. So, when it comes to coronavirus, it's important to first become aware of what you believe is safe or unsafe at this time. Looking up the facts and/or talking to an objective, non-judgmental person can help with that. Overall, keep in mind that your personal boundaries are about what feels right for you. They can be fluid and change as the virus's impact on your local area changes.
- 2. Communicate clearly:** When you're clear about what you feel is safe and unsafe, you can openly communicate your limits to others. I know this is a lot easier said than done; but if you work on managing your own anxiety (rather than other people's), you'll have an easier time communicating your boundaries. Be as clear and straightforward as possible. Remember, you don't need to defend your choices or overly apologize for them.
- 3. Remember it is okay if others aren't happy with your decisions:** The people in your life might not be happy with your boundaries or accept them. They may even try to convince or pressure you to do things their way. This is especially hard to manage when you're a people-pleaser—especially if it's coming from someone you don't want to upset. People might try getting you to do what they want you to; but remember, standing for your boundaries and values doesn't make you a bad person, even if it upsets other people. The people who push back about your choice to social distance most likely mean well; they probably just miss seeing you. But even with the pressure they apply and the feelings of guilt you might feel, hold onto your boundaries and remember that you can still be a good family member and friend, even while saying no.
- 4. Make a plan:** Like I said, family and friends may be disappointed when you set boundaries; but you don't need to sacrifice your health to make them happy. If you know a particular person might trigger you or get upset when you set boundaries, come up with a plan of action. Before you get emotional, thoughtfully work out how you might respond and exit the conversation if it gets overwhelming. It's hard to think clearly when you're in the moment and nervous. So, come up with a plan beforehand. It will always be a little uncomfortable, and sometimes a little difficult, to set boundaries with certain people. But over time and with practice, it gets easier.

When you're a people-pleaser, setting boundaries isn't easy—especially if you're already anxious. Be patient. Take note of what makes it hard for you to set boundaries, and come up with strategies to get past those obstacles. It's okay to not get it right all the time. It's always a good time to work on boundary-setting, even if you don't do it perfectly. Your health and safety are important. Be clear about the boundaries and limits you want to set. You can even write them down to remember them! Just remember that no matter how clear your boundaries are, you may still get pushback from the people in your life. This doesn't mean you're wrong. In some cases, taking care of ourselves means disappointing others. You can be understanding of their feelings, but you aren't responsible for them.

Improving the Quality of Your Social Connections

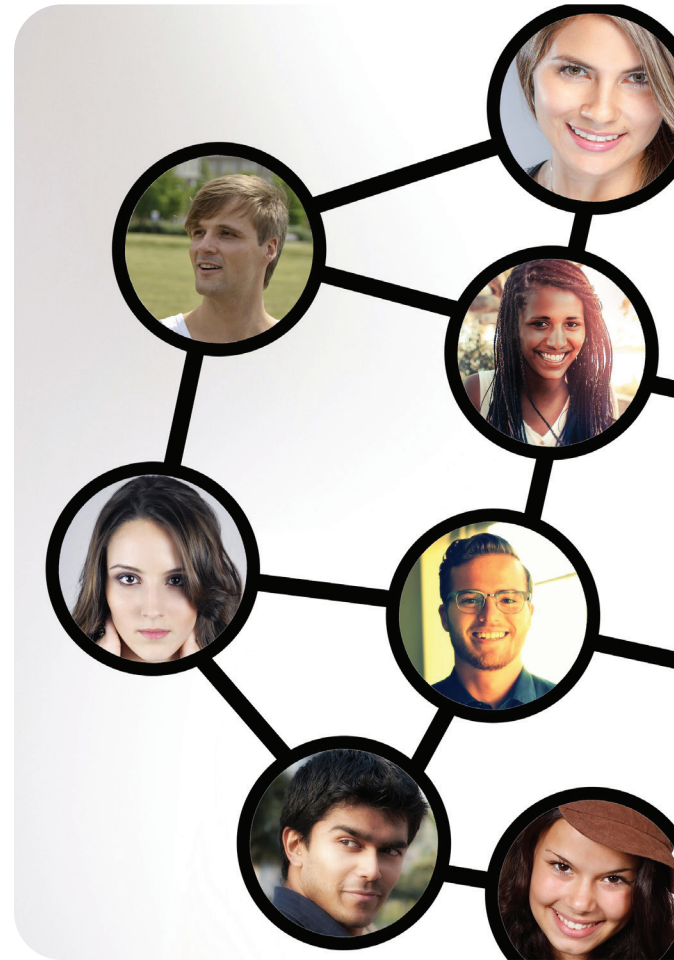
Coronavirus Anxiety Workbook, by The Wellness Society

How do you cultivate connection in a period of isolation?

Here are some ideas:

1. Use the online support resources listed in page 7 of **The Social Connection Planner**.
2. Explore improving your communication skills using pages 12-14 of **The Social Connection Planner**.
3. Talk to volunteer listeners on a helpline (see pages 20-26 of **The Social Connection Planner**).
4. Use this time as an opportunity to complete the **Relationship Inventory Exercise** (see page 27).
5. Schedule video chat catch ups with friends you haven't spoken to in a while.
6. Use the video chat app **Houseparty** to play popular games like trivia and Heads Up! with friends.
7. Have a virtual happy hour over video chat.
8. Browse **Meetup.com** for events that have been transferred to online.
9. Organize a weekly lunch date with a friend over video chat.
10. Use the **Netflix Party** extension to watch Netflix with your friends online.
11. Send letters to your loved ones using a service like **Postable**.
12. Play Scrabble and chat to friends using the **Words with Friends** app.

What else could you do?



“More than anything else, being able to feel safe with other people defines mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.”

-Bessel van der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score*

*Thanks for reading,
we hope you found the information useful!*

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