

CONNECTIONS

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What Matters Most Right Now for Your Child

By Dr. Laura Markham, **Aha! Parenting** (Used with the author's permission)

If you give yourself enough support, you can do these hard things.

For families with children, the end of August in the Northern Hemisphere is usually a time of excitement, anticipation, and new beginnings. But this year we're in an odd time warp, where we're being thrust headlong into a future we're not ready for (can school really be starting?) while we're still mired in the uncertainty and limitations of a pandemic.

If you're a parent in the U.S., this has been a hard month, no matter what decision you've made about your child's education. The stakes are high, and we don't have enough information about what's going to happen to make confident decisions. And, in fact, there are no good answers to this dilemma.

- If you're sending your child into a school building, you're probably biting your nails even as you put on a brave face for your child.
- If you're helping your child with remote learning, you're remembering that learning from screens (at least as most schools are managing it) isn't age-appropriate for children and requires nearly constant supervision from parents.
- If you're hiring someone else to teach your child with a few other kids in an academic pod you're probably dipping into funds you need for something else, feeling guilty that you can do that when others may not be able to, and still worried about how effective this arrangement will turn out to be for learning and COVID-mitigation.
- If you're a seasoned home-schooler or un-schooler, you're most likely finding that your usual schedule of activities and meet-ups is still curtailed, so you're schooling in isolation.
- If you've decided to try home-schooling or un-schooling for the first time, you might be encountering daily challenges that make you wonder if you're really cut out for this. (Don't give up! It gets easier.)

Regardless of your situation, this pandemic is probably highlighting for you that teaching is very hard work, and that our educational system needs some serious

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Hello City Employees,

There are so many different things to be concerned about these days that it's difficult to find respite, even for a short while. What once seemed like ordinary activities now warrant careful consideration – going to school and work, grocery shopping, visiting a family member, voting.

Many things are happening that appear to be beyond our control, so let's turn to what we can do something about:

1. Stay informed in order to make decisions that make sense for you and your family and put your first focus on staying physically healthy. If you are working outside the home, take the time to prepare the supplies you need to protect yourself and maintain a sanitizing routine when you return home so that you stay virus-free.
2. In your bubble, allow yourself to deeply relax and arrange your space and your time in order for that to happen. This is primarily when you are going to be able to nurture your mental health and general wellbeing in the way that works for you.
3. Carve out some time every day to stop thinking about the pandemic and find satisfaction in making something or learning something or laughing with friends. There is so much we can still accomplish remotely and the pandemic shouldn't be a barrier to pursuing what you enjoy.
4. Consider participating in an upcoming series on **Building Resiliency**. This series of discussions will provide a place to learn skills and share ideas about how becoming more resilient can prepare you for the unexpected events that might otherwise cause stress.

Hope the tips we have included in this month's newsletter are helpful, thanks for reading!

~ The EAP Team



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re-thinking and overhaul. Anyone who's paying attention is being reminded that our society needs to do a better job of supporting parents in general, and especially now, when we're all in the impossible situation of trying to keep money coming in at the same time that we're supervising and teaching children.

Luckily, our children are resilient, and if the decision you've made about school doesn't end up working for you, you can change it and do something else. This isn't the year to obsess about academics. A child who is curious and loves to learn will easily catch up in school, with a little support.

It's also true that tough times force us to dig deep and develop our inner resources. So we're all enrolled right now in a crash course in resilience that's imparting lessons we'll use for the rest of our lives. But there's no way to sugar-coat this. It's a tough time for parents and children, and we're in for more uncertainty in the months ahead. So I want to take this moment to remind you of what's most important for your child to thrive, even during hard times: A warm connection with you.

You are at the center of your family. You create the weather in your home. When the pandemic is over, what your child will remember is how sunny your home felt, or how stormy. When they had a hard time, did their parent understand and help? Was the mood positive and fun? Were tears accepted and comfort offered? When mistakes were made, was grace extended? Was there room for each person in the family to express their full self with all their growing edges, and be loved unconditionally?

This may sound like a tall order in these stressful times. And yes, there will be days when you blow it big time, like every other parent sometimes does. But remember, your child is also enrolled in this crash course in resilience. He or she is learning lessons they'll build on for a long time. Your calm, patient nurturing is the foundation they need for this learning.

And that means that your priority has to be taking care of you, to maintain your own sense of well-being. When you're running on empty, you can't be the emotionally generous parent your child needs and deserves.

That means giving yourself the support you need to be your best as often as you can be, and compassion and grace when you mess up (as we all do). So make a short checklist of research-proven self-care strategies, and every day, check it off.

- Did you get enough sleep?
- Move your body to re-energize yourself?
- Eat healthy food to support your immune system?
- Get outside to breathe some fresh air and connect with nature?



- Spend a few minutes with a guided meditation or prayer?
- Connect with someone who cares about you who isn't your child?
- Talk to yourself like someone you love and give yourself constant encouragement?

It's hard to show up as the parent you want to be when you're under this much stress. But like your child, you can do hard things—if you give yourself enough support. If we've learned anything from this time of isolation, it's that nobody can do the hard work of trying to be a good human, or the harder work of trying to be a good parent, alone. We all need support and love.

What support do you need to manage the stress you're juggling? How can you give yourself that support? What one thing could you do today to move in that direction? What next step could you take tomorrow?

Giving yourself support takes work and discipline, but over time it builds your inner resources, and makes life much easier. Remember, you don't have to be perfect. Two steps forward, one step back still takes you in the right direction. Within a few months, you'll find yourself in a whole new landscape. And you might find that life looks a whole lot better from there, even in a pandemic.

Dr. Laura Markham is the founder of [AhaParenting.com](https://www.AhaParenting.com) and author of **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids**, **Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings**, and her latest book, the **Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids Workbook**.

DEALING WITH POTENTIAL EXPOSURE: THE STRESS OF PHYSICALLY REOPENING SCHOOLS

As officials push to reopen schools, many people still don't feel safe going back in person yet. Across the U.S., districts differ in their plans—some are fully virtual, others are fully in-person, and many are following various hybrid models. You're probably experiencing stress about an uncertain future. If you're on edge and feel like you're waiting for something bad to happen, that's anticipatory grief.¹ It's especially confusing with COVID-19 because you know that the virus is out there and causing harm, but you can't physically see it. The threat of potential exposure to COVID-19 is scary. Some fear is good because it makes you vigilant about taking precautions, but too much fear can do more harm than good. If you are a teacher or have a child that will be going back to school in-person—whether full time, every other day, or every other week—it's important to prevent that fear from becoming debilitating.

FOR PARENTS

ACKNOWLEDGE PRODUCTIVE VERSUS UNPRODUCTIVE WORRIES.

Some worries are productive to think about, like what you'll do if your child comes home sick. Other worries don't have any answers, like how long will we have to live like this. When a worry pops into your head, figure out if it's something you can plan for or if nothing can be done. If you can make a plan, do it! If not, remind yourself that thinking about it won't change anything.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL.

People like predictability. During such an uncertain time, controlling what you're able to will likely give you an added sense of security. Make a schedule for yourself that includes time for things you enjoy (and stick to it). Plan ahead for anything that feels overwhelming—deciding on weeknight dinners over the weekend can take some of your mental burden away from the following week. Think about other things you can do to increase your feelings of safety during this time.

TAKE A BREAK FROM THE NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA.

While it's important to stay up to date on the news, a lot of media coverage related to school reopening is the same thing over and over. Social media can be riddled with false information, worst-case scenario stories, and heated arguments that go nowhere. Save yourself the added stress by limiting your overall consumption or tuning out once in a while.

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR NEEDS.

You know your family and kids best, so speak up if there is something about going back to school that needs adjusting for your circumstances. Maybe you're an essential worker and can only help your kids with distance learning at night—let their teacher know if you need to schedule an evening phone call to make sure you're on the same page. Or maybe someone in your home is immunocompromised, so you don't feel safe with in-person schooling right now. Ask your district about options to continue virtual learning despite the general plan to return to schools.

DO WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

Deciding what to do in terms of schooling right now can be difficult. When weighing choices, think about both your family's needs and situation as well as your comfort level with what your school is doing to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Every student and family are different, so do what works best for you—no apologies necessary.

SOURCES

¹Berinato, S. (2020, March 23). *That discomfort you're feeling is grief*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

Tips for Working Remotely with Children

By Arlyn Gonzalez, MSW, LCSW, EAP Specialist

We are months into teleworking, without a foreseeable end in sight. For parents tele-working can be both a blessing and a challenge. As a working mother myself, (with a 1 year old son), I know how lucky I feel to be able to see my son throughout the day and be there for the small moments. But I also know how much of a challenge it is to have to juggle the responsibilities of child care and work. To be interrupted even when you think you need to appear “professional” such as during meetings. Below are some tips that may help you find the right balance of working from home with children. Remember these are unprecedented times, we have changed the way we live, and what we thought “work” should look like is changing right in front of our eyes.

- **Make a plan.**
 - » If you have a support system ask for help. Get your partner on the same page as to how you will share the work load.
 - » Make a plan as to how you will take care of your children and/or assist them in remote learning.
- **Get creative with your schedule.**
 - » Given your job, are you able to work outside your general working hours? If so, talk to your supervisor and come to an agreement. It may be helpful to work during times that you may have help with your children or when your children are asleep.
- **Be honest with your supervisor.**
 - » You are not alone in the difficulties of working from home with children. Talk with your supervisor about what you can or cannot do.
 - » Ask for the accommodations that may be helpful for you.
 - » If needed, you may be able to use the Emergency Paid Leave or FMLA Child Care* to assist you during this time (e.g., working 35 hours per week instead of 40 hours).
- **Create a routine for yourself and your children.**
 - » Kids tend to do better when they know what to expect.
 - » Kids crave attention and interaction. Try to carve out a few breaks of at least 5 minutes to play with them.
- **Maximize nap time.**
 - » Use nap time to get work done.
 - » Try to prioritize the things you need the most focus for or a quiet environment for. For instance making phone calls.
- **Use technology to your advantage.**
 - » Use the mute button during meetings when you are not speaking to silence your background noise.
 - » If you need to attend to your children during meetings and need privacy, turn off your camera and let the other attendees know you are still present.
 - » If you have a smart phone or tablet, use that to get work done when putting your kids to sleep or when you cannot use your laptop/desktop.
 - » Put cartoons on the TV for your children, it may keep them entertained (in addition to toys).
- **Don't rely on your memory, get organized.**
 - » Keep a to-do list with all of your tasks and prioritize what you need to get done.
 - » Write things down, it is easy to forget the little things especially when kids are constantly interrupting you (e.g., emails you were going to send).
- **Communicate with your coworkers.**
 - » Let your coworkers know that you are working from home with your children. They will be more understanding of the interruptions when your children show up in your meetings or conference calls.
 - » They will also be able to better understand if you are working during odd hours.
- **Be kind to yourself!**
 - » Be flexible, things won't always go as planned.
 - » Remember to breathe and be compassionate with yourself.
 - » You are doing your best in this stressful and unusual time!

What you should know regarding Expanded Family Medical Leave for Child Care/School Closures

Employees taking FMLA Child Care due to school closure for the Fall 2020 school year will need to provide documentation that the school their child attends is closed and classes are only being held virtually. Acceptable documentation can be notice printed from the school district's web site or an email from the district to parents stating that schools will be closed for in-person learning. PLEASE NOTE: If your school gives parents the option of in-classroom learning or virtual learning, and you elect virtual learning, **you are not eligible** for FMLA due to school closure (reason #5).

Expanded FMLA is set to expire December 31, 2020 and is applicable to wages paid through that date. The last pay date of 2020 will be 12/23/20 and will cover the period 11/29/20-12/12/20. PLEASE NOTE: **This means December 12th is the last day employees may take FMLA for child care due to school closure.** Any leave taken after December 12 will not be FMLA and will not be paid at 2/3 of the employee's wage. You will have to use other paid time (EPL, vacation, floating holiday, sick leave) to cover any missed time due to child care after December 12.

At this time the Federal government has not extended the **Expanded Family Medical Leave for Child Care** beyond December 31, 2020. The **FFCRA Leave Request form** provides more information.

Any questions about Emergency Paid Leave or FMLA Child Care should be directed to Human Resources staff:

- Denise Nettum, 266-4616, dnettum@cityofmadison.com
- Greg Leifer, 266-6530, gleifer@cityofmadison.com

LEADERSHIP *Matters*

Tips for Managing Temporary Remote Teams

By Teresa Douglas, [Medium.com](#) (Used with the author's permission)

“Let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning.” — Winston Churchill

COVID-19 cases have been detected in the US and internationally. Because of this, there are locations where employees are or will be working remotely on a temporary basis to help stop the spread. Fortunately, you can minimize disruptions to your team's productivity with some advance planning. Use the tips below to ensure a smooth transition to temporary remote work.

Access—Hardware and Software Check

Don't wait until your employees are forced to stay home to figure out if they have the right access to tools and software outside the office. At the most basic level, do your employees have a computer or other appropriate device at home? Do their devices have space for company software? If an employee doesn't have an appropriate device, consider requisitioning the necessary equipment or advising about a work-around solution for the duration of the COVID-19 situation.

Other software/hardware issues to think about:

- Do your employees handle sensitive documents or data? Do any of them need access to a VPN? While this can be set up remotely, it may be faster to set this up while everyone is in the office.
- Employees who work remotely can still see each other via video calls. Pick a video meeting app (Zoom, Google Hangouts, or Skype are some examples), and perform a dry run.
- Is the employee's home internet adequate for video calls? If not, what is the plan to mitigate this? Can the company reimburse employees who need to upgrade their internet?
- Should school closures be in effect or a spouse/partner or housemate also be required to work from home, will the internet/WiFi connections be sufficient for all members of the household who may be working simultaneously?

Continuity of Service

According to the [CDC](#) “It's likely that person to person spread will continue to occur.” In the event that an employee becomes too ill to work, or must care for a sick family member, it's important to put plans in place now to cover for absent employees.

In areas where COVID-19 is widespread, some companies choose to have small numbers of employees rotate in and out of the office. This serves the dual function of minimizing the spread of the virus while keeping business functions running as efficiently as possible. If you opt to follow this example and work in a building with extra security, double-check that your employees can get in if the security staff are not there to open the doors.

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If you have employees working from home with children, here are some additional tips:

- If possible, consider being flexible with work hours. Is the employee able to work outside the general working hours? For instance, can they work a few hours in the evening when their partner may be home and they have child care or their children are sleeping?
- Be mindful of how meetings are being scheduled. Parents may not be able to have back-to-back meetings and may need some time in between meetings to care for children. Is it feasible to have 10-15 minute breaks in between meetings? This may vary per situation and should be discussed.
- Get creative in working with the “chaos” of being around children. For instance, using earphones to help minimize the background noise that children make and to help focus.
- Create a supportive work environment by understanding and normalizing that kids may appear on camera or may be heard in the background and that it is okay!
- Each employee's circumstances and job will vary, talk to your employee about what would be helpful for them. Be flexible and compassionate, remember that these are difficult times and everyone is trying their best.

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Whether everyone on the team or some of the team go remote, there are steps you can take to continue to push forward on key deliverables. These include:

- If an employee covers for a team member, they will need to know what the absent employee is working on. Each employee should create a list of projects with links to needed documents. Each project should list its due date and status (not started, in progress, blocked, finished). Both the list and the needed documents should be moved to a shared folder that the entire team can access.
- Managers should create a system for tracking projects to keep track of all projects and timelines. Share this tracker with your team and ask them to keep it updated. That way, you can have a real-time overview of where things stand.
- Employees may need access to servers or software outside of their job scope if they will be covering for an absent employee. Double-check that your employees have what they need to cover for each other.
- How will the team handle sensitive information or documents? Is there already a process in place, and can it be used remotely?
- Remember that you might get sick. Is there someone else your employees should talk to in the event that you can't make decisions? Should the team self-organize, and if so, who should keep track of the project tracker?
- It's not enough to give everyone access — make sure the entire team understands how to divide up work if teammates get sick or must unexpectedly care for a family member.

Remote Management Best Practices

The remote workforce runs on trust. It is all too easy to worry that employees will slack off if they are out of sight. Or to worry that you don't have a good overview of what everyone is working on. The biggest mistake new remote managers make is to try to micromanage their way out of this discomfort. Fortunately, you can learn from the mistakes of others.

Savvy Remote Managers Don't:

- Text or call employees randomly throughout the day to see if they're working.
- Force employees to log what they worked on every hour of their workday.
- Use software to take screenshots or log keystrokes to prove that they're working.

Instead, remote managers track outcomes, not time spent in the seat. You can prove that your employees are working by:

- Holding regular meetings so that employees can discuss what they're working on, ask for help, or provide updates. A short team video meeting is an efficient way to do this.
- Use your project tracker to keep an eye on projects and deliverables.
- Ask team members to list their working hours in their email signature, and in their calendars.

Remember: Employees will be working outside of their office environment, without the usual support structures for their personal responsibilities. Children may be home from school, housemates may also be working from home, and employees will be trying to work in less than ideal circumstances. Stress levels may be high, and tempers short.

If you want to help your team to be as productive as possible then you should:

- Consider allowing each team member to work flexible hours on an as-needed basis, to the extent this is realistic. For example, employees with young children may wish to allocate some of their work hours to the early morning or evening so they can work without interruptions.
- Hold a daily meeting, ideally no more than 15–30 minutes, (taking alternate schedules into consideration when picking this time) so the team can collaborate in real-time. Each person should have a few minutes to talk about what they're working on.
- Create a protocol for telling the team if someone gets sick and can't work. If someone fails to report in by a certain time, then the team can assume the person is absent from work. If employees are too sick to work but well enough to write in, then that person should alert the team.

Note: The single biggest service a manager can provide to their team is to acknowledge that you are working under extraordinary circumstances. No one will be at their best, but together, you will do your best. Someone's child will scream during a video call. Someone's internet won't be as good as advertised. Provide some forgiveness upfront, and your team will be forgiving with you when you inevitably misstep. You may never have wanted to work remotely, but if you take a strategic approach, you and your team will come out the other end of this situation stronger and more united in purpose.

Essential Self-Care for Essential Workers on the Frontlines of COVID-19

By Rubina Kapil, **Mental Health First Aid**

If you're a frontline worker, we thank you for your work and applaud your courage. You're keeping society running in the face of some extreme stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic! The good news is, you're not in it alone, and there are things you can do to protect your mental health.

Mental Health First Aid teaches that trauma affects people differently, and a mass traumatic event, such as a pandemic, can have lasting effects. Trauma can be direct (your own experience) or vicarious (something you've witnessed others experience). COVID-19 checks all those boxes.

Essential workers on the frontlines comprise almost half of the workforce — including fields such as grocery and general merchandise stores, food production and food processing, janitorial and maintenance, agriculture, trucking, health care and protective services (police and EMT).

These are the people who aren't locked down at home: They're going to work, dealing with the public and experiencing burnout, exhaustion and fear. The reality of that lived experience is underscored by **research from the Kaiser Family Foundation**, which found 56% of American adults (and 64% of frontline health care workers and their families) reported that worry or stress related to the pandemic has affected them in at least one of these ways: sleep problems, poor appetite or overeating, frequent headaches or stomachaches, difficulty controlling their temper, increased alcohol or drug use, and worsening chronic health conditions.

However, there are ways to protect yourself from the mental and emotional impact of COVID-19 trauma. Here are a few tips from the MHFA Curriculum and National Council for Behavioral Health member Jefferson Center for Mental Health (Wheat Ridge, Colorado).

1. Give yourself credit.

You're going to work, probably with an increased workload. You may be interacting with the public. Your household income may have shrunk. No matter how stressed you are, your emotions are valid and natural. Acknowledging this is an important component of maintaining your mental wellness.

2. Go back to basics: eat, sleep, move.

Take care of your body, but be realistic. If you can't fit in eight hours of sleep in a row, try power naps (15-20 minutes) to recharge. Try to eat as healthfully as you can. Try to move, because movement helps mitigate the effects of stress hormones.

3. Tackle stressors one at a time.

What can you do—directly or indirectly—to deal with your stressors? Can you reduce the amount of news you consume? Can you sleep more? Can you give yourself permission to simply do the best you can?

4. Ask for help.

If you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of anxiety or depression, don't be afraid to ask for help. Your employer may have resources, such as an employee assistance program (EAP), to help you cope with the current situation, so talk to your supervisor about what's available.

5. Be kind to yourself.

What makes you feel good? Do you like to read, to exercise, to journal? Find your "things" and make a few minutes for them. Focus on what you need to get through today rather than exploring the "what-if" rabbit hole. And remind yourself: Your work matters. You are helping people every day!

6. Foster relationships.

Hanging out with friends isn't part of the physical distancing environment, but phone calls, texts, emails and teleconferencing apps are, so reach out as you can. Or go old-school and write a letter or send a card. Taking time to stay connected with your support network helps you and them.

If you—or someone you know—feels overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, hopelessness, fear or exhaustion, or may be considering suicide, call 911.

You can also contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990), the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255) or the Crisis Text Line (text MHFA to 741741).

CITY OF MADISON



Building Resiliency Series

Presented by EAP, HR/Organizational Development

OCT 05 - NOV 09 (Meets Mondays at 3PM)

OCT 08 - NOV 12 (Meets Thursdays at Noon)

Register at tinyurl.com/Resiliency-2020

Resiliency is our ability to bounce back from adversity. During these uncertain times, it is important to actively work towards being more resilient by learning to thrive within the stress. Join the discussion.



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

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