

Yikes! I'm Home With My Kids: 3 Steps to Retain Sanity During COVID-19

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It's as easy as 1, 2, 3. This is what many of us were told growing up, or when learning something new. Well, it's not always as easy as 1, 2, 3. So, what do we do now? It's been over a week, and the glow of so much family togetherness is fading and we're settling into the reality that we ARE at home with our kids. Ok, I'm here, and my kids are home too. Right now, they're still asleep as I write to you before dawn. I'm adjusting as well, to this dramatic and sudden shift in lifestyle, remote learning, and working from home. So, let's explore three steps to stay sane... together.

1. Transparency

Think about it, some children haven't even been told what a virus is. Children worry and need clear, concise and direct information. Your kids will thank you for this later, but until then choose openness, communication, and accountability for your family. When it comes to sharing information, whether about COVID-19 or other aspects of life, children are very good at what is known as 'Cross Contamination'. Through texting and social media, they share information with each other that still leaves them misinformed or ill-informed. As parents, we now more than ever, are in direct opposition with this. Consistent transparency allows children to rely on their parents as being credible sources of information, allows them to easily gain a fuller understanding of what is happening, and understand why certain decisions and actions were made for your family, the city, our nation, and the planet. **Know that it's key to make adjustments between transparency and confidentiality mandates, if and when required (I'm not sure what she is trying to say here...I would just delete).** Raise ethical concerns and hold each family member accountable to alignments between your family vision, mission, and collective work around what safety actually looks like -physically, socially and emotionally- for your family unit. In time, your children will value your honesty in not only sharing information but also in your planning and decision-making strategies for your family and within your community.

2. Adaptability

As adults, many of us have figured out ways to handle change, ignite our flexibility muscle and smoothly deal with multiple demands. Staying sane during a crisis requires major shifts of priorities to cope with rapid change. This requires a different set of competencies for adults and especially for children. Being able to adapt your responses and tactics to fit fluid circumstances often requires more self-regulation (self-control) than in normal circumstances. Whether an adolescent or a young child, our children require and deserve guidance, room for trial and error, practice, supervision and corrective measures. They need all of this plus time in order to 1. Adapt to changes, 2. Manage disruptive emotions and 3. Learn to show restraint when stressed or challenged. As we all are strengthening our adaptability and emotional competency, be gentle with yourself, proceed with respectful, cordial or civil behaviors, stay composed and be positive. Having an arsenal of patience and deep breaths in your back pocket can certainly arm you to model prosocial behaviors of being focused under pressure, being open to new ideas, thinking before speaking or acting impulsively. Modeling these behaviors will help to steadily imprint them onto your children. They will see that these prosocial behaviors are necessary for adapting to and coping with these changing events.

3. Stability

Children thrive when presented with a strong sense of reliability and predictability. A growing sense of stability can definitely come from holding regular family meetings. Together, you can share plans and goals for the week, admit to household error and intended corrective measures, and elicit additional support for the week. In your upcoming family meeting, acknowledge that COVID-19 has disrupted everyone's life, not just theirs. Share that together the family will take part in creating (and contributing) new norms in order to bring a sense of stability to your collective new way of life over the next few weeks. Feel free to confess that it is not your job to 'entertain' them, but that life will resume with structure, schedules, and support... in the house... together. It's ok to be firm and nurturing as you share expectations of stability and sustainability. Age-appropriate contributions around the home will be expected along with work, school, chores and fun time. Each regular family meeting will afford children a welcome sense of continuity, belonging and confidence. They too can *add* value to larger (or smaller) family decisions and grow, because they are valued contributors.

Now, breathe. For this week, let us practice transparency, adaptability and stability. Our words and actions model and encourage trust, respect, and, ultimately, safety for our children. If there are a few inconsistencies, give yourself a break. Be reassured that if we make mistakes, that we ARE NOT our mistakes. Let's stay sane through this together.