

Ways to Help Children Cope During a Pandemic

Being a psychologist and having spoken with many working men and women with children, I have come to the understanding that taking care of children while working from home is quite an uphill task. Here are some tips which I hope would be useful to help ease the challenge faced by parents and/or caregivers while they take care of our enthusiastic next generation.

➤ *Allow children to share their story*

Have an open communication with your children. Children have valuable inputs which they can bring to a discussion. Allow yourself to listen to them. Children have many thoughts and questions in their minds which need to be expressed. This will help them grow intellectually and feel involved in the family.

➤ *Listen to their perception of the problem*

No matter how young your children are they all face problems. We may find their problems silly and unimportant, but to them it may cause stress and anxiety. Make them feel heard. Listen to their point of view.

➤ *Keep media to a minimum*

I know how difficult it is to manage children while working from home. But giving phones, tablets or other such devices to keep them occupied is not healthy. Television too isn't the answer to keep children occupied. Limit the use of social media, online games, television et cetera. Engage them with intellectual talks, you could speak about current issues with them. Encourage them to read books, newspapers, magazines which would help shape their personality.

➤ *Have an open dialogue about feelings*

When children express themselves they feel happier. They also need to be taught to identify their emotions correctly and express it all in a healthy manner. Don't be afraid to express your feelings with them too.

➤ *Incorporate breaks throughout the day*

Breaks energize your mind. Just as breaks are essential for us while working, children need breaks too especially during lockdown period.

➤ *Increase body movement*

Children are a bundle of energy. It is disheartening that during the pandemic they aren't able to utilise this energy. This is the age they are social and develop their interpersonal and social skills along with physical skills. So it would be helpful if parents try to incorporate minor physical activities at home in your day-to-day lives.

➤ *Provide a safe environment at home*

Home is a place where you feel safe and relaxed. Creating a safe environment at home does not mean just a physically safe place but also mentally and emotionally. During the lockdown period, most of us are spending our days at home with families, it is natural to direct out irritation and frustration on each other. At such times, we need to pause and think before we could do any damage.

➤ *Share appreciation and gratitude*

We all like to be appreciated for our efforts but, do we appreciate our family members? We take everything for granted. There is a real need to practice gratitude. Appreciate your spouse, your children, your parents, your neighbours and so on.

➤ *Engage in self-soothing activities*

These are activities which help you relax your mind and body. Any activity which helps you de-stress can be a self-soothing activity, it could be meditation, yoga, working out or just a cup of tea. Do not shy away from taking time for yourself to relax.

➤ *Keep your stress away from children*

There could be a number of reasons why you may feel stressed- work related issues or personal issues. While it's normal to feel under pressure and worry, but it won't help if you take it out on children.

To keep stress at bay, practice gratitude, appreciate each other, take breaks, engage in physical activities with children, have open communication with family members, share and allow other members in the family to share their emotions with you. Please reach out to a mental health professional if you need help managing your stress and anxiety.

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