

Realistic Expectations for Pandemic Parenting

A 1 Hour Webinar to Help Parents Cope

Location(s): Washington, D.C., Northern Virginia, New York, NY

Intended For: Parents of Children Ages 4 - 14

Date/Time: Friday, May 15th: 1:00 - 2:00pm

Description:

- Many weeks into this pandemic, you have heard that perfectionism is not the goal, but what does that mean for you and your individual family? Dr. Abigail Romirowsky will lead parents in this one hour webinar designed to help you maintain your own and your child's mental health during this time of social distancing. These days, parents have even less time and more stress, so Dr. Romirowsky has concrete concepts and strategies that you can remember and integrate into your daily parenting life (during COVID-19 and beyond).

Below are companion notes for watching or rewatching the webinar:

- An overall note: Age/developmental stage and temperament/personality of each individual child will impact the range of how each of these recommendations are implemented; if you are ever unsure of whether your child's behaviors are within range for his or her age or temperament, please consider individually consulting a pediatrician or child psychologist.

Aim 1: Help parents tune in to their child(ren)'s emotions and their own emotions

#NameWhatYouFeel

- Now is an important time to "level up" on your emotions vocabulary and ability to accurately name your emotion (and likely multiple simultaneous emotions) at a point in time
- An emotion only needs to be changed if it's getting in the way of something really important
- It is unrealistic to keep kids (or yourself) mostly happy and fulfilled during this time, just as it is unrealistic for people of any age to always be happy during non-crisis situations
- During non-crisis situations, it is normal and human to experience a broad range of emotions.
- During a crisis time, children and adults will also feel fear, anger, and sadness at different levels of intensity, manifesting in different ways.
- Kids are at baseline very resilient, and allowing them to feel their feelings will actually help develop their resilience further.
- Help children learn to name their emotions without expectations necessarily of changing their emotional experience. This can have a surprising amount of impact on lowering the intensity of one's emotion.
- "Bored" and "tired" are common words kids use to describe when they actually feel sad or angry. If this is a possibility for your child, responding with suggesting ideas of what activities they

could do is understandable but ineffective. Instead, identify different activities that you see available in areas of your living space. If that doesn't spark an idea, assume bored is code for another emotion and focus on naming it.

- If your child is bored, try to let it be without fixing it, whenever possible.

#UncertaintyIsNotDangerous

- Uncertainty is a part of everyday life even without a global pandemic.
- Find ways to practice tolerating uncertainty and accept it. Every minute you devote to this now will pay dividends in the future.
- Remind kids that they have what it takes already inside them to be okay in the future.
- Remind kids and yourself that being okay doesn't mean things are easy or always fun. Life is boring when that's the case anyway.

#ConsiderTherapy

- For some of us, an unexpected challenge can reveal the shortcomings of our typical ways to cope.
- Do yourself and your family a favor and find a therapist online who can provide that personal support that you need and deserve. This is especially important when the pandemic affects everyone you know, so most people don't have bandwidth to provide the emotional support they usually can to friends and family.
- Many of us are pretty unkind to ourselves inside our own heads, we might need help changing our internal narrative, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the best way to do that.

Aim 2: Help parents reframe their short-term parenting goals without abandoning their personal parenting values

#KidsAreResilient

- Again, children are inherently resilient.
- Give yourself permission to focus on maintaining their mental health now so they can adjust as society adjusts (very very) gradually back to normal.

#ScreensAreNotDangerous #ButExcessStressCanBeToxic

- The "rules" are different now, and the pandemic is actually giving us an opportunity to learn why the "rules" exist.
- For now, screens are a necessary tool so let's clarify why the message exists that "screens are bad".
- Research suggests that screens are primarily harmful for children if they are largely replacing normal developmental activities. For young children, this may be regular interaction with people to develop language skills. For teens, this may be regular activities to build social skills.
- The available range of normal developmental activities is microscopic right now because of social distancing, and thus the relative harm of screens is actually lower.
- The overall likelihood of irreversible damage from screen use during the pandemic (so long as there is some value to it - social, visual-spatial, social emotional, academic) is extremely low.
- In contrast, the likelihood of negative impact on kids when parents are losing their temper on their own, with each other, or with them during the pandemic is pretty high.

#OneWeekAtATime

- No one is going to send home report cards on how “well” you parented during this pandemic.
- Resist the urge to evaluate yourself on a daily basis.
- At the end of each week (not day), ask yourself: did my child generally-speaking have a balance of how time was spent? This does not mean equal time, this means representation generally of different types of activities, such as:
 - some interpersonal connection (be it in-person with family, via technology with friends or family, or even asynchronous when kids are spending time making something for a friend)
 - some alone time without screens (allowing for some boredom and creativity)
 - decent quality screen-based stuff

Aim 3: Help parents prioritize aspects of their child(ren)’s daily routine based on children’s needs and parents’ realities

#EatingAndSleeping

- Double down on everybody’s eating and sleeping habits
- Don’t force kids to eat things they don’t want right now, prioritize getting a nutritional balance (see above for #OneWeekAtATime)
- We are all eating for comfort, allow this within reason

#BeLikeElsaAndLetItGo

- If you find yourself in a battle, step back and force yourself to explain to a fictional person why it’s worth fighting.
- If the answer is all about future-oriented worry, let it go for now.
- If the answer is about your long term parenting values, consider how reasonable living up to those values is right now.
- This is also good parenting skill to practice for any situation that is rough, like a new baby in the home or an unexpected illness.

#TheyAreWhoTheyAre

- Children largely come out who they are in terms of genetic predispositions and temperament.
- We have minimal control over shaping them, so use those efforts intentionally because parents have minimal fuel in their tank without a pandemic, and much less so with one.

WASHINGTON DC

5225 Wisconsin Ave. NW Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20015
202-363-1010
DCinfo@rosscenter.com

NORTHERN VA

1595 Spring Hill Road, Suite 520
Vienna, VA 22182
703-687-6610
VAinfo@rosscenter.com

NEW YORK, NY

57 W. 57th Street, Suite 912
New York, NY 10019
212-337-0600
NYinfo@rosscenter.com