



Parenting During COVID-19: Resources and Tips

Remember: This is everyone's terrible first time! (TFT)

World renowned social researcher Brené Brown calls difficult, stressful first-time experiences (such as learning to drive, first day on the job, first day riding a bike without training wheels) Terrible First Times (when she works with people over 18, she calls them FFTs... 😊).

Brené explains that this pandemic is a giant TFT for all of us! In order to manage the discomfort that occurs during a TFT, she suggests we:

- 1. Identify it** – accept that our feelings exist and allow ourselves to feel them. Notice emotions in ourselves and our children: some days are good, some are sad, some are frustrating. Allow, rather than avoid these feelings.
- 2. Normalise it** - Remember that there is no manual for how to do this. It is hard for everyone and we are all doing the best we can!
- 3. Put it into perspective** – This means we often have to re-think our expectations: what is reasonable to expect of ourselves and our children at this time? Is it reasonable to expect a parent to stay calm at all times?

Remember: Safety first - Put on your own oxygen mask!

The airline cliché applies here: you simply will not be able to do your best parenting when you are not managing your own anxiety and distress well. Children learn from you. They need you to model how to be calm and clear. Of course, it's ok for your children to see that sometimes you feel sad, angry, or confused: these are normal emotions. However, let your children also see the way you manage situations without letting your emotions get in the way. If you are experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed, despair, aggression, or hostility these are signs that your own wellbeing is suffering. You need to take action.

PLEASE take your mental wellbeing seriously.

If you experience ongoing low mood, loss of pleasure, changes in appetite or sleep, or feelings of persistently being overwhelmed or out of control, **YOU MUST SEEK SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF.** Seeking support is a wonderful thing to model for your children.

Model self-compassion: Be Your Own Best Friend

We all make mistakes, and as parents / carers we can be especially hard on ourselves. Notice when you feel guilty and inadequate as a parent: all parents know this feeling well. Ask yourself what you would say to a friend in your position... and say these things to yourself. Ask yourself what YOU need, *really* need, as an act of kindness. Practicing self-compassion and forgiveness is important to model for our children so they learn that it is ok to make mistakes and that relationships can be repaired. We can reconnect and express love: even after we have yelled at them!

Remember: You already have what they need

Dan Siegal, Neurobiologist, suggests that young people need to be safe, seen, soothed and secure. You can continue to provide these things by giving your attention, your love, and your curiosity.

Discuss safety – Reassure your children that as a community we are all doing everything we can to keep everyone safe. You can also provide additional reassurance that you will make decisions to ensure their safety.

Stop, look, and see your child. This involves becoming curious – we need to try to understand the minds of our children and how their thoughts and feelings are expressed through their behaviour. This is far more complex than just responding or reacting with rewards or consequences. Ask yourself, “why might my child be asking for more screen time?” It may be for fun, or as a distraction from big feelings like stress, boredom, frustration, worry etc.



Soothing – children need help to deal with difficult emotions and situations. They also need to learn how to use their emotional regulation skills independently as they get older. What things does your child or teenager find soothing? How can they remember to access these when they are experiencing a big feeling?

Security – this is a sense of well-being that is usually met when the other 3 S's are achieved. The child will feel secure, even as difficult feelings arise. They will know they have support when they experience difficult moments, as well as the capacity to cope when circumstances call for it.

Get Curious When Managing Misbehaviour

Get curious before you get angry – What is happening in your child's mind? What is the meaning behind this behaviour/request/tantrum? You could ask yourself: "What does my child *actually* need right now? Can I give it to them now?"

Curiosity can sometimes tilt anger into a more productive direction. Our child's annoying behaviour might become more amusing to us, or might lead us to help or teach them, rather than punish.

If you make a mistake, and experience anger, it's OK! Practice self-compassion in the moment, and then get curious afterward! Why was that hard for you? What did you need in that moment? Was your child the only one who could meet that need for you? What worked? What didn't? If you could press rewind, what would you do differently?

Resources

So many great resources have been developed and shared to support families during this period. Here are our recommendations.

For Adult Wellbeing

FACE COVID - This brief resource outlines steps we can take to respond well to the uncertainty we are experiencing in the pandemic. It is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

Living with worry and anxiety amidst global

uncertainty – This free resource contains information targeted to adults about anxiety, especially in relation to the pandemic, as well as series of exercises to complete. It is based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

Beyond blue – Beyond Blue has a designated Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service (1800 512 348). Alternatively, you can call their regular 24/7 hotline on 1300 22 4636.

Australian Psychological Society (APS) Tip Sheets – Evidence based guidance in clear, simple language: [Tips for coping with coronavirus and anxiety](#)

[Maintaining your mental health during social isolation](#)

[Use of alcohol and other drugs in the COVID-19 environment](#)

[Loneliness and social isolation in the time of COVID-19](#)

For Parenting: Tips and Encouragement

There are lots of great resources online, from parenting training to groups and Instagram pages that provide tips, strategies, and encouragement.

For parent management programs, we recommend: **Parentworks** – a free, evidence-based online program (you will need to consent to participation in a research study, but this is all anonymous) **Triple P** – another evidence-based parenting program

If you prefer books, we recommend Dr Dan Siegal's compassionate and evidenced based books relating to children (The Whole-Brain Child) and teenagers (Brainstorm). [His website](#) has some resources too.

An Instagram, account we recommend is [@mombrain.therapist](#). It contains very validating infographics and tips, and recognises that parenting is hard, but also rewarding. Please note, most of the images refer to "mums", but we think these equally apply to dads and anyone caring for children! We'd love to hear what you find helpful!

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