

# COVID-19 Family Tips

“LIKE” documentary expert Dr. Jerry Bubrick is a Senior Psychologist in the Anxiety Disorders Center at The Child Mind Institute & Director of the Pediatric OCD Program, Here are Dr. Bubrick’s specific tips for PARENTS to manage the Coronavirus anxiety in their home with the school closures:

*So you may be worried about what may happen in the future, based on how you’re feeling now. But all that really means is you’re worried now, so take steps to cope with it now. We’ll deal with tomorrow later.*

- Preparedness doesn’t mean panic.
- Don’t make the mistake of trying to control what you can’t – it’s the recipe for breeding anxiety.
- Remain calm and roll with the rapidly changing developments.
- Remember, this is just temporary.
- Recognize and cherish this time that our country is pulling together and not polarized. (i.e. 911, the flood)
- Reposition your view and look at this as an exciting time of unprecedented “opportunity”.

**MODEL.** If your kids see you hysterical or spiraling downwards, know that despite what they say, you are their biggest influence.

**FUN CHALLENGE.** In this unprecedented downtime, allow your kids & teens to make this time exciting – rearranging their room to reflect their maturing style, inventing a new recipe. See if they like learning online!

**HEAR THEM.** Don’t shut your kids down when they voice their worries. Instead of saying “you’re being ridiculous now” acknowledge it with a “*I hear that you are worried about....*,” but follow up with some of the rational anxiety busters above.

**STRUCTURE, STRUCTURE AND MORE STRUCTURE.** Remember, even if your kids are couch potatoes during the weekend or school holidays, during the normal school days, their life is scheduled to the minute. Set up a timeline in your home for learning, grooming, exercising, chores, sleep and even play.

**LET’S GET PHYSICAL.** Exercise is key. Ideally, a run or long walk outside or kicking the ball is best. However, if your home doesn’t allow for that, invest in a jump rope or encourage them to explore the online workout videos on TV.

**SOCIAL MEDIA – A TIME & A PLACE.** With “distancing” being our new normal, our kids will actually *need* to use their devices to connect (as opposed to just weeks ago when it was the addictive unhealthy replacement to in-person contact). However, don’t let this become a free-for-all. Schedule it, and encourage them to use apps like Facetime and House Party, which provides face-to-face contact and speaking.

**PLAN FOR FUN.** This is real life and kids and adults alike need “non-productive” breaks. While you should require your kids to pitch in to help with the house, especially as it’s being lived in and used more than normal, don’t confuse this time as all-day free labor in between their online learning. Schedule time to veg on the couch and watch silly TV, to visit with friends (on social media).

**LET TIMERS DO THE DIRTY WORK.** To prevent a sloth-like spiral of unproductive zombie depression, let the “beep beep” be the reminder to “turn it off” so that you don’t become the enemy.

**THE JOY OF GIVING.** Science has proven that doing a kind act releases the brain chemical oxytocin, the “feel good” chemical that can almost provide a high. Set up a 1-A-Day kindness challenge in your home. Call an isolated relative or friend. Start a gently used shoe drive for charity. Mail a letter to a soldier. Mow or rake a neighbor’s lawn. Pick up groceries for an elderly neighbor. Recapping the competition each night will help keep the “helper’s high” going.

**PLAY “ROSE, BUD THORN.”** To prevent family members from solely sequestering to their own space with their eyes glued to their screen, this game -- where you must name your highlight and low point of the day, as well as what you are looking forward to -- naturally fosters interpersonal discussion.

**PARENTAL TIME.** Remember, overnight, you became a hunkered down home-schooler. Even if you’re not a virus alarmist, it is very normal to feel the pressure and stress of this 24-hour, shared time together. Just like you schedule their online learning, exercise and fun... schedule time for YOURSELF, setting very clear boundaries about interrupting when your kids are safe. Whether you use that time to be productive or simply to meditate, make it be adult-time for you.

**There is a big difference in what is happening in the world and our own perception.**

*Think about turbulence in a plane. Your reaction to the turbulence is to be afraid of what this might mean, not being safe, uncertain outcome, etc. But the reality of the situation is turbulence is a normal part of flying and isn’t actually dangerous.*

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