

**19 Tips for Parenting
During COVID-19**



19 TIPS FOR PARENTING DURING COVID-19

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Please note: This is not legal advice for a particular jurisdiction. Anyone who needs legal counsel should contact a Fellow of the AAML found at aaml.org.

For Parents:

1. FOLLOW COURT ORDERS as much as possible.

Some court orders provide for reasonable and likely contingencies, but no one could have anticipated this unprecedented situation. Adjustments will inevitably be necessary. But the closer you can adhere to the original court orders, the less the likelihood that you will suffer legal consequences later. Many jurisdictions have *mandated* that parents follow existing court orders. Judges will not regard favorably parents who use the coronavirus as an excuse to change an agreement unilaterally.

2. FOLLOW STATE AND LOCAL ORDERS.

In addition to your divorce decree, state and local orders, which you are obligated to obey by law, can provide solid, irrefutable guidance for you and your ex. No, your ex cannot take the children to the park and have a picnic with a large group of friends. This is now against the law. Conflict occurs when court orders seem to conflict with COVID-19 restrictions.

3. BASE YOUR DECISIONS AND CHOICES ON RELIABLE NEWS SOURCES.

Do not be swayed by the rumor mill on social media. Depend on major national and local media and government sites like cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) for your information. If a startling story

appears on one site, check to see if it is confirmed by other reliable sources.

4. USE YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS.

This is not the time to re-litigate old disagreements with your ex. For the sake of your children during this crisis, make every effort to settle disputes with your co-parent related to exposure to the virus, symptoms, financial and other changes in both your circumstances, with all the civility and reasonableness you can muster. If your best efforts fail, you can consult your pediatrician or therapist as an outside arbiter and, increasingly, you can work virtually with mediators, parenting coordinators and lawyers to resolve issues remotely, thus avoiding a possible enforcement hearing or future modifications.

5. BE HONEST.

Be completely transparent with your ex about any possible exposure of your child or a family member to the virus, and certainly about any symptoms your child may exhibit.

6. ARRANGE TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME.

If your ex is not able to see the children as much as is customary, be generous in arranging for the children to have more time with your co-parent later, when the crisis is over. If you put your revised agreements in writing and stick to them, a judge is likely to appreciate accommodations that have been made by both of you when court orders could not be followed.

7. LEARN HOW TO BE VIRTUAL!

This is the time to expand your technical skills. Learn how to use FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, or Go to Meeting. Lots of folks stuck at home are being creative, arranging virtual dinner parties, cocktail parties, play readings, sing-alongs, etc. You can help your children spend time virtually with your ex—and with grandparents who can't be visited--reading books, playing games, telling stories. The good old telephone is also a useful communication tool.

For Parents and Children:

8. TELL THE TRUTH.

Children will have many questions about the drastic changes in their circumstances as a result of the pandemic. It's extremely important to

explain what is happening as best you can, according to what is appropriate for your child's age group.

This is one good resource from the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Nurses:

https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/02292020_NASP_NASN_COVID-19_parent_handout.pdf

9. ACKNOWLEDGE FEAR.

This entire experience has upset almost every aspect of the world as your children know it. Being afraid is a natural response. They may worry that they will never get to play with their friends again, or that they or you may get sick. It's important to acknowledge fear but also to reassure them that everyone is taking steps to avoid infection and end the spread of the virus, and they can play an important role—by carefully washing their hands, for instance, several times a day, and taking care of their own health with good food, exercise and lots of sleep.

10. TEACH SAFETY.

Even the smallest and most fearful child can gain confidence by being taught steps he or she can take to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. Washing hands and being healthy in general are good beginning steps. You can also teach your child about social distancing whenever she does go outside—to the park, for instance, or to the grocery store. Children can even have fun guessing and then measuring to see how big a distance of six feet actually is.

11. TURN OFF THE TV/RADIO/COMPUTER.

While it is worthwhile to stay informed, it is not a good idea to keep the coronavirus news blaring, unmonitored, 24/7 when there are children in the house.

12. LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Zoom and the other apps mentioned earlier are not just tools to connect children with parents and grandparents. They are also great tools to bring children together in virtual play dates, which could involve baking cookies, doing an art project or having a dance party. Children can also connect with familiar teachers virtually for a play period, a pep talk, or a lesson.

13. CONTINUE TO PURSUE LEARNING...CREATIVELY.

You may now have a new and unexpected role as a homeschooler. Developing routines that involve some learning for your children every day is a good idea, but be reasonable--with yourself and your child. This is probably not going to be the period of learning in his/her life that will determine his SAT score or which college will admit her. Even if your child is already in high school, lots of allowances will be made for this massive break in everyone's course of study and for a sudden flood of pass/fail grades because no one was able to actually finish the course. If your child's school does not provide a homeschooling curriculum, there are many, many resources online.

14. SAY YES WHEN YOU CAN.

Children are hearing so many "no's" these days. You can't go to school, see friends, visit grandparents, attend birthday parties, participate in sports. In this situation it's good to be able to say yes to something fun or even silly every once in a while, like having scrambled eggs or pancakes for dinner. Or having a day when everyone stays in pajamas for the whole day. Or having a mud pie party in the back yard.

Taking Care of Yourself:

15. PRACTICE CALMING TECHNIQUES.

We all need some help chilling out during this crisis. If you haven't done it before—or even if you're already an expert at the One-handed Tree Pose--this might be a good time to try an online yoga class, focusing particularly on your breathing. Or you may decide to learn to meditate. Your children could even try some of the yoga poses with you.

16. IN ANY CASE, MOVE!

Another option is to get outside—at least six feet from anyone else, of course—and go for a jog or a walk, just to clear your head. But, whatever your chosen method, everyone needs to get some kind of exercise and not just remain hunched over the computer or phone all day. The internet offers a wide variety of exercise classes of all kinds.

17. GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK IF YOU'RE HOMESCHOOLING.

If you have not been a homeschooler and do not have an education degree, you may feel you are floundering at helping your children keep up with their schoolwork. Even middle-school math may challenge those of us who last saw one of those infamous "word problems" decades ago! These days there are many, many resources online. We are not alone in our struggle. It's probably good to have some study time every day, but

probably best not to spend the whole day in lockdown. Your child's entire future will not be determined by whether you can explain quadrilateral equations or teach him/her to summarize the central themes of *Hamlet* in a five-page essay.

18. CREATE A ROUTINE FOR WORKING FROM HOME.

If you are one of the lucky ones who still has a job, you will learn that working from home presents a whole new series of challenges, which are intensified if you are also taking care of children and trying to homeschool them. It helps if you can organize your day and set aside some hours for your own work and some for teaching. Bosses have to be taught also that they cannot expect you to be available, even virtually, from 7AM to past midnight every day if you have children to teach and care for. While some parents are wanting a child to have *less* time than usual with the other parent, because the parent is a medical staffer or is exhibiting possible symptoms of illness, etc., others may find they actually need the other parent to take the children for *longer* periods than usual, because of their own increased work load. Every family has to create their own balance.

19. REMEMBER THAT AT SOME POINT THIS WILL END BUT WHAT YOU DO NOW WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

Governor Cuomo of New York mentioned in one press conference that he had some of the best conversations he ever had with his daughter when she was self-isolating, because he was giving her his full attention. Parent and child isolated together, or parent and child trying to connect virtually, may find that they have special opportunities to give each other their full attention, which seldom happens in our usual rat-race days. When this is all over, those unique connections, those moments of closeness, may become surprisingly precious memories. You are demonstrating now how important your child is to you by the attention you are giving him and your commitment to keeping her safe.