

HOW TO TEACH KIDS RESILIENCE THROUGHOUT COVID-19

After experiencing a traumatic event, your child may feel anxious or scared as trauma can be stressful for everyone in a family. As a parent, one thing that you can do to promote your child's emotional well-being after a trauma is to teach them resilience skills. Resilience is our ability to thrive or bounce back after a stressful situation and the good news is that it can be taught! Here's an outline for how you can build resilience skills with your child in one week:



MONDAY: MAKING A SCHEDULE

Whether times are uncertain or not, all children benefit from having a routine in place. Following a schedule provides consistency, structure and predictability. Here are some things to consider when creating a family schedule:

- Establish nap and bedtimes, even on weekends
- Include times for healthy snacks and meals
- Homework time
- 30-60 minutes for the resilience-building activities listed below (Tuesday-Sunday)
- Have each member of your family share five self-care activities they enjoy and add them to the schedule for the week. For example, doing a puzzle, reading a book, coloring, going on a family walk, digging for worms in your backyard, planting flowers or writing in your journal.

TUESDAY: EMOTION IDENTIFICATION

Today is a great day for a family movie night, and what movie does a better job of describing the internal world of a child than Pixar's "Inside Out"?

- Consider making a family fort and gathering your favorite movie snacks.
- After the movie, grab some markers and paper and have your child draw what recent feelings they have experienced.
 - What does that feeling look like? What would it say if it could talk?
 - What does that feeling need to feel better or safe?

WEDNESDAY: COPING SKILLS

Today is the day to practice different ways to manage big emotions! One big emotion that we can feel sometimes is stress and when we get stressed, we tend to experience muscle tension. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a great way for children and adults to manage stress and relieve muscle tension by tensing and releasing different parts of your body one by one. There are free PMR scripts online to read aloud, as well as free guided online videos. A creative way to teach children PMR is by telling them that you are making the muscles in their bodies go from hard, uncooked spaghetti into relaxed cooked noodles. Check out the *Resilience-building: Coping skills* and *Deep Breathing* handout for two more coping skills to teach your child!

THURSDAY: FAMILY COPING BOX

A coping box can include tools that different family members can utilize when feeling stressed and should be placed somewhere in the house where everyone can have access to it. Please refer to the *Resilience-building: Family coping box* handout for more instructions on how to build your family coping box.

FRIDAY: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

It is natural for disagreements and conflicts to occur in the home, but how you overcome them is what builds resilience. Here are some communication rules to establish in your home when a disagreement occurs (see the *Resources* section below for “Fair Fighting Rules” handout):

- First, check in with yourself and identify what you feel upset about.
- Bring it up to the person you are upset with and make sure to discuss one issue at a time. For example, “I am upset that I have been washing all the dishes every day.”
- Be careful to not use degrading or derogatory language and to not raise your voice. The goal here is to have a productive and healing conversation.
- Use “I” statements when expressing how you feel so you are taking responsibility for your feeling. For example, say “I feel hurt when...” instead of saying “You made me mad...”
- Be mindful of not interrupting each other. You can set a one-minute timer to let everyone have their time to speak.
- Take a timeout when things start getting heated. Identify a length of time you need a break for, so the other person knows you are planning on returning to the conversation. For example, “I am feeling overwhelmed right now and need a 15-minute break from this conversation.”
- Remember that you are working toward a compromise or at least a shared understanding of the situation, so go into this conversation with that mindset.

SATURDAY: MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a powerful tool to help us slow down, pay attention and be fully present in the moment. Refer to the *Practicing Mindfulness* handout for more ways to teach your child mindfulness.

- Sit on the floor facing your child. You can sit on a cushion or pillow. You can use a bell or a singing bowl (there are free ones online) to call your child into focus and attention.
- Encourage your child to listen to the bell until it is no longer chiming or singing. It may only last a few seconds, but those few seconds of their complete attention is very powerful.
- Make it a game and have them raise their hand when they can't hear it anymore and see who has the better hearing.

SUNDAY: GRATITUDE

To end the weekend on a good note, let's engage in practicing gratitude for all the things we have and get to experience. Research has found that teaching gratitude to children increases their happiness, optimism and generosity. One way to teach your child about gratitude is to pair gratitude with a symbol. For example, every time you see an airplane in the sky, you remind yourself to think of one thing you are grateful for. This will help reinforce the practice of gratitude throughout your day. Please refer to the *Cultivating Gratitude* and *Mood Booster Jar* handout for creative ways to teach your child about gratitude.

CONSIDERATIONS

Here are some things to consider when engaging in all these activities with your child:

- Make sure to have it be a technology-free time, and you are providing your child with your full attention.
- Listen and reflect on what your child is saying while engaged in the exercises. When your child says, “Mom, I am using the red marker to draw a red, mad face!” you can respond by saying, “You're picking the red marker to draw your mad face.”
- Provide praises throughout the activity to encourage and reinforce positive behaviors

Feel free to continue to repeat elements of this weeklong schedule as many times as you want. The reinforcement of these skills is what helps make it stick for children, so the more practice, the more we are increasing their resilience — or their capability of taking on challenging situations.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Fair Fighting Rules <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/fair-fighting-rules.pdf>