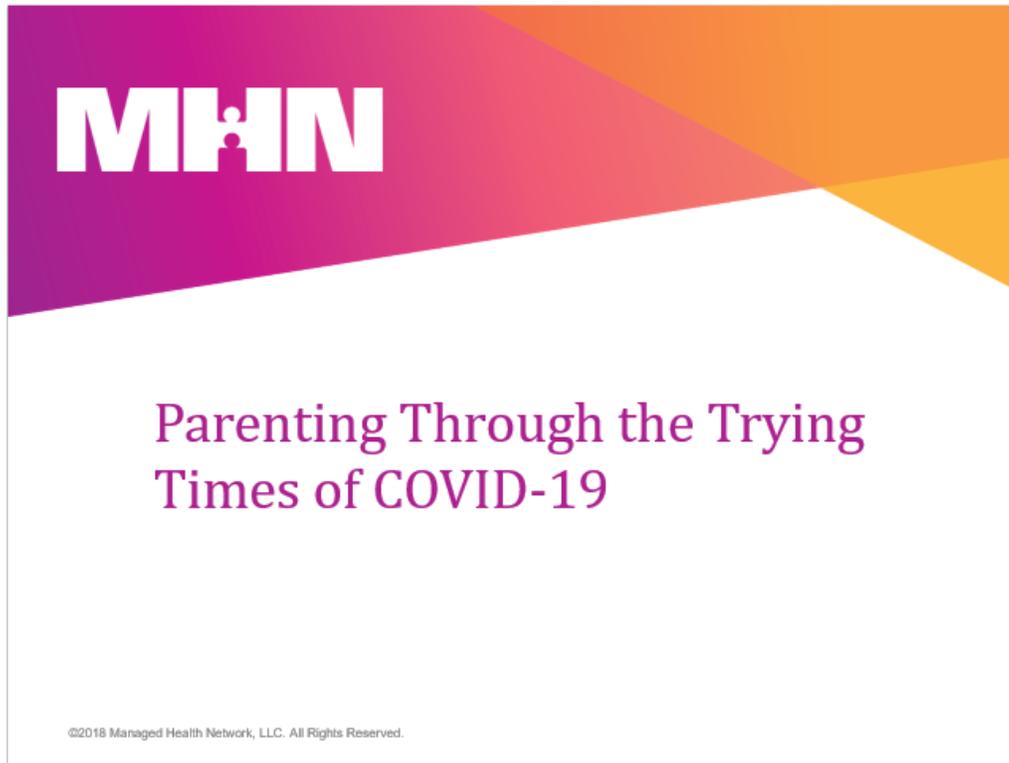


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Slide 1



## *Participant Guide*

## Slide 2



### Learning Objectives

- Discuss current challenges and concerns faced by many parents
- Emphasize the value of having 'reasonable' expectations
- Review ways to help your child if they're anxious about COVID-19
- Review "home alone" safety precautions for kids
- Consider ways to see the upside during this time
- Offer self-care reminders

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## Slide 3



### COVID-19 Brought Immediate and Significant Changes in Day to Day Life

*COVID-19 hit and life as we knew it changed overnight.*

*For many...*

- The threat of serious illness created fear and insecurity
- Shelter-in-place and social distancing led to isolation and loneliness
- Abrupt business and school closures demanded entirely new routines and structure
- Pressures increased with children being home full-time, requiring 24x7 supervision
- Living with uncertainty about the future became the norm

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Slide 4

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## Current Challenges, Concerns & Fears

- What's challenging right now?
- What are your current concerns?

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## Current Challenges, Concerns & Fears

**Current challenges for parents...**

- Missing their 'routine' and 'normalcy'
- Lack of child-care
- Difficulty working with kids at home
- Feeling that nothing is being done *well*
- Lack of personal space/alone time
- Lack of connection with adults/peers
- Worrying about parents getting sick
- Feeling overwhelmed/burned out
- Financial challenges
- Economic uncertainty
- Anxious about getting sick
- Uncertainty about work
- Not eating well/exercising regularly; weight gain
- What else?

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## Current Challenges, Concerns & Fears

*Parent's concerns about their kids...*

- Having too much screen time
- Being or getting behind academically
- Not getting enough social interaction
- Being moody/depressed/acting out
- Not eating well
- Not honoring social distancing (teens)
- Not getting enough parental attention
- Getting sick
- *What else?*

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## Acknowledging Grief and Loss

*"We are all dealing with the collective loss of the world we knew."*

-David Kessler, public speaker, author and grief and loss expert

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## Understanding Grief and Loss

- *What are the losses for **you** during this time?*
- *What are the losses for **your kid(s)** during this time?*
- Be aware of any symptoms of grief that may come up during this time
  - ❖ Emotional Symptoms
    - Shock and disbelief
    - Sadness
    - Guilt
    - Anger
    - Fear
  - ❖ Physical Symptoms
    - Fatigue
    - Nausea
    - Lowered immunity
    - Weight loss or weight gain
    - Aches and pains
    - Insomnia
- Give yourself and your kids time and space to process any grief and loss that you may be experiencing (individually and collectively)

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## Remember Compassion & Empathy

*Show compassion towards yourself and your child/teen*

- Acknowledge losses
- Validate disappointments
- Listen without judgment

*Engaging in compassion practice has been shown to be beneficial for emotional well-being and may help in decreasing stress.*

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## Have Reasonable Expectations of Yourself

*Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, have you:*

- Adjusted your expectations during the pandemic (of yourself as a parent, as an employee)?
- Communicated openly with your employer about unique challenges at home?
- Have you redefined your standards around parenting? Housework? Meals?
- Set expectations that all members of the household contribute to chores, clean up, etc.?

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## Questions to Consider

- What matters the most to you, right now?
- When your kids look back on this time, what do you hope they will remember?
- When you look back on this period, what do *you* hope to remember about how you navigated as a parent?
- What might be consuming significant time and energy that you could let go of?

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### Parenting Tips

1. Provide structure, a daily routine, and activities
2. Loosen the reigns around media use/screen time
3. Pick your battles
4. Find ways for your kids to connect w/others
5. Connect to something larger
6. Help your child if they're anxious about COVID-19
7. Address safety and boundaries when your kids are home alone

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### Provide Structure, Routines, and Activities

- Set regular bed and wake-up times
- Start and end your workday at consistent times
- Have a plan for the day
- Involve your kids in creating their schedule for the day
- Create daily and weekly rituals and activities
- Schedule projects and check-ins
- Respect everyone's need for together-time and for alone-time

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## Structure, Routines and Activities: Schooling

- Let your child know what to expect
- Find out how your child feels
- Create a schedule, a routine, and a place for remote learning
- Partner with teachers for strategies and techniques to help with your child's learning
- If your child is struggling, identify resources and support
- Instill good hygiene practices and set a good example
- Connect with other parents

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## Screen Time – Should You Worry?

*According to a recent article in the New York Times...*

“The most recent and rigorous large-scale studies report that evidence linking screens to harm is in reality, paper thin... There are only small associations between the amount of daily digital technology usage and adolescents' well-being.”

**Source:** [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/opinion/screen-time-kids-covid.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/opinion/screen-time-kids-covid.html)

*Dr. Mike Brooks, in Psychology Today's article, Should You Worry About Kids' Screen Time in This Pandemic? says:*

“We are in a pandemic crisis right now. It's okay that our kids are spending more time on their screens. It's more appropriate to direct our attention to higher priorities.”

**Source:** [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/tech-happy-life/202004/should-you-worry-about-kids-screen-time-in-pandemic](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/tech-happy-life/202004/should-you-worry-about-kids-screen-time-in-pandemic)

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### Screen Time – Should You Worry? *Cont.*

- In terms of content, quality matters more than the quantity
- Parents are the best judge of the content kids should engage with and the quantity of use
- To avoid battles, establish and stick with limits as much as possible on what and when
- Kids also need healthy doses of physical activity, outdoor time, unstructured play, connection with family, and adequate sleep
- Give yourself permission not to worry about additional screen time during the pandemic

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### General Tips for Parenting

- Prioritize positive feedback, and pick your battles
- Help your child/teen stay electronically connected with friends
- Connect to a larger purpose

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## How to Help if Your Child Feels Anxious About COVID-19

- Normalize anxiety
- Identify ways in which your child has some 'control'
- Stay calm, listen, and offer reassurance
- Monitor television viewing and social media
- Take time to talk
- Be honest and accurate
- Keep explanations age-appropriate
- If your child exhibits significant changes in behavior, seek professional help

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## Addressing Safety and Boundaries - When Your Kids Are Home Alone

- Identify how your kids can contact you (or another adult)
- Establish regular check-in times
- Ensure your kids know what to do in unexpected situations
- Discuss scenarios when to use 911
- Make sure there is enough food in the house that your kids can eat without a lot of preparation
- Establish rules and agreements regarding technology use, friends coming over, etc.
- Take necessary precautions with any medications (prescription or over-the-counter), alcohol, firearms, tobacco, car keys, lighters or matches

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## Try to Find the Upside

Opportunities may exist for:

- Witnessing the good in people
- Performing altruistic acts
- Resuming and/or cultivating hobbies
- Living more simply
- Finding gratitude
- Building memory artifacts
- Learning about adversity and building resilience
- *What else?*

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## Your Self-Care is Essential

*Take good care of yourself*

- Exercise
- Eat a nutritious diet
- Engage in hobbies/activities that you enjoy
- Stay connected to friends and extended family
- Get adequate sleep
- Create space/time for yourself
- Use healthy stress management strategies
- Look for humor

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## Resources

- Talking to teens and tweens about COVID-19
  - [www.nytimes.com/2020/03/02/well/family/coronavirus-teenagers-anxiety.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/02/well/family/coronavirus-teenagers-anxiety.html)
- Quality media and at-home learning opportunities for your kids
  - [www.common SenseMedia.org/resources-for-families-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic](http://www.common SenseMedia.org/resources-for-families-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic)
- Mindfulness and meditation practices and exercises:
  - <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/accessing-your-ability-mindfulness-times-stress>
  - <https://centerformsc.org/practice-msc/guided-meditations-and-exercises/>
  - For children:
    - [www.headspace.com/meditation/kids](http://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids)
    - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxbdx-SeOOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxbdx-SeOOg)
- Printable time capsule workbook
  - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N6viPb3wICFH\\_i6XB0\\_3STr9KcyGRwAQ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N6viPb3wICFH_i6XB0_3STr9KcyGRwAQ/view)

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## Handout A: Additional Screen Time – Should You Worry?

### Content

- In terms of content, **quality** matters more than the quantity of time or size of screens being used, for all children.
  - The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that babies younger than 18 months should have no screen time at all. The exception to this rule is video chatting with grandparents or other family friends, which is considered quality time interacting with others. Toddlers 18 months to 24 months old can start to enjoy some screen time with a parent or caregiver.
  - The available science shows there isn't a firm "right" amount of screen time for kids, however what's appropriate does vary by age. Children 7 and under should have less than those 8 and up. As children grow older, their ability to make sense of and to emotionally manage screen content increases. Similarly, some children react more strongly to media technology—some are more fearful of dramatic shows and others aren't.
  - For younger kids, try to prioritize content developed by reputable sources, like PBS Kids. Many decades of research on educational programming, and most especially Sesame Street, demonstrates that well produced and age appropriate educational programming can provide an excellent learning environment for children. Fortunately, there is lots of content beyond Sesame Street for preschoolers and older children, such as Wide Open School which can be found on YouTube.
  - Organizations such as Common Sense Media offer age-based recommendations for movies, television, books, apps and games and can be good starting places to look for ideas or to learn more about the media your kids are already using. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Cincinnati Zoo also offer live cameras that entertain as well as educate and are good distractions for toddlers.
- Parents know their kids best and are the best judge of what and how much media use is the appropriate amount.
- To avoid battles, establish and stick with limits on what and when, as much as possible.

### What to Avoid

- Many years of research and governmental investigations have demonstrated that violent content should be avoided so as not to encourage children's aggressive behavior.
- Similarly, research recommends that overly suggestive and sexualized content should be avoided especially for younger children.
- Some research also suggests that fast-paced, stimulating shows, like "PJ Masks," may be more likely to trigger attentional problems in children over the long term than slower paced media that's more relatable and less distracting, like "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Live cameras also mimic real life at a realistic pace, which has been

shown to lessen overstimulation — when developing brains get over-excited by a barrage of sensory experience. Strive for a balance between them.

- Older kids may turn to video games, which many experts say are not associated with violent behavior. A positive aspect of playing video games like Fortnite or Overwatch is maintaining social relationships during a time when face-to-face interactions are limited. Gaming meets our fundamental needs for exploration, competence, and social connection. And games often improve rather than undermine reasoning abilities.
- There is evidence that viewing television right before going to bed or having tablets or smartphones in the bedroom interferes with children's sleep cycles. Many experts recommend no screens at least one hour before bedtime.
- And again, you know your children and to avoid what you know isn't good for them. So for example, if your child is anxious you would naturally avoid the news or a scary video.

### **Context, meaning how we interact with our children around the media, matters too.**

- When possible, watch jointly with your child to help them make sense of the content and shape their interpretation. Naturally, this isn't doable if you are hoping a program will distract your 3-year old while you're on your Zoom conference. Remember, this is not a time for perfection or unrealistic expectations.
- If you have friends and families who can help and want to engage with your child during work hours, you can plan time frames when their children connect in real time with friends or other family using apps like Caribu, which allows them to read a book or color together remotely.
- Also, planned family time around screens can create invaluable opportunities to talk with adolescents and teens about issues that young people face at their age. For instance, Netflix's controversial movie *Thirteen Reasons Why*, which deals with difficult issues such as bullying and teen suicide, has offered an opening for parents to talk with their adolescents about these and other issues.
- And, clearly children should do more than use screens all day long— they need healthy doses of physical activity, outdoor time, unstructured play and connection with family, along with adequate sleep and ideally, a nutritious diet.

### **Summary**

In short, parents shouldn't be dismayed and fearful of increased screen time during the pandemic. Having limits and putting attention to content are important but give yourself permission not to stress about their screen time during this crisis. You don't need more stress on your plate right now.

### **Adapted from:**

- [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/opinion/screen-time-kids-covid.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/opinion/screen-time-kids-covid.html)
- [www.forbes.com/sites/ellenwartella/2020/05/21/as-kids-screen-time-surges-during-the-pandemic-heres-what-research-suggests/#2d78b5a45112](http://www.forbes.com/sites/ellenwartella/2020/05/21/as-kids-screen-time-surges-during-the-pandemic-heres-what-research-suggests/#2d78b5a45112)
- [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/parenting/manage-screen-time-coronavirus.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/parenting/manage-screen-time-coronavirus.html)

## Handout B: A COVID-19 Survival Guide for Parents of Tweens and Teens

Be positive. Don't judge. Avoid micro-managing.

Your teenager may be eating too much, not sleeping enough, annoying a sibling, or behaving in other ways that aren't ideal. One of the reasons it's hard to be a teenager is the pervasive sense of being judged. Children are blissfully unaware of the perceptions of others, but teens are painfully, brutally aware, and believe that everyone is looking at them with critical, mocking eyes.

So, intervene only when truly necessary. Avoid nagging and criticism. Trust your teen to figure out the small stuff, even if it means they're suffering consequences you could have warned them about. No matter the provocation, make sure your teen feels your positive gaze.

Listen.

Let your teenager know you're available to listen or to do some problem-solving if they want that. When they want to talk, be fully present (no distractions, no devices) and be fully positive (no criticism, no judgment). Offer no solutions, just patient attention and acceptance. Try to avoid giving advice, but instead to ask the questions that lead them to identify the best possible solutions. Any solution they feel they've invented will be worth a hundred solutions you've given them.

Expect drama.

During the teen years, everything is changing rapidly—your child's body, brain, hormones, and emotions are all on overdrive, even without this virus and the need for physical distancing, and the cancellation of everything they care about. Even the wisest and most thoughtful teenager will have moments when this feels like too much to handle. Let that be okay. Your teen may try to aggravate you, but you need to be the grown-up here. Do your best to stay calm and give them the reassurance they really need, that you will do everything in your power to keep them safe.

Expect power issues and conflict.

The adolescent development research shows it's good if you argue frequently with your teenager, as long as there's also love and good humor in your relationship. In fact, the best long-term outcomes for kids occur in families where there's lots of warmth, as well as plenty of inter-generational discussion. A hot debate is a great way for your teenager to discover what you care about, and why it's worth caring about. As much as possible, respond thoughtfully to the substance of your child's issues with you without reacting to their tone.

Expect resentment.

This is a hard time for everyone, and teens don't have the neurological maturity to keep it in perspective. There will be times when your teenager is angry and frustrated and looking for a target for that. You are it. Even worse, if you are enforcing the guidelines and insisting your child stay home, they are probably furious even at the same time they're relieved you're keeping them safe.

Rethink the household rules.

This is a good time to have a family discussion about what everyone needs in order for home to be a safe and happy place. Give up as much power and control as you can, including loosening the media rules, without undermining your child's physical and mental health. Do insist, though, for your own well-being and that of others in your household, that your teenager take some responsibility for managing their moods, not imposing their grouchiness unduly on the rest of the family. (And obviously, the grouchiness rule applies to parents too.)

Help your child broaden their horizons.

This is a great time to talk with your teenager about their hopes and dreams, and to look for ways to help them explore possibilities they haven't yet considered.

Put it in perspective.

Remind yourself that your child once was a wonderful human being, and is doing their imperfect unconscious best to become that again. When my now-wonderful adult daughter was a teenage nightmare, I found a photo of her as a sweet four-year-old. I taped that photo to the fridge. Remembering who she used to be reminded me of who she really was, and helped me stay strong and loving, which is what she needed most of all.

Get help.

If you're dealing with a seriously troubled teenager (drugs, violence, etc.), the extra stressors of this time may push things over the edge. Follow these suggestions, but also get the help you need to provide your teenager with a more solid foundation for moving into adulthood. There are psychological helplines being set up to help troubled kids get through the extra challenges imposed by COVID-19.

Your teenager needs you now more than ever. Do what you can to be kind, patient, and loving, and to model good coping skills. That means taking good care of yourself, being patient with yourself as you think together about the best way through this stressful time for your family.

**Source:** [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/202003/is-the-new-normal](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/202003/is-the-new-normal)

## Handout C: Helping Children Cope During COVID-19

**Normalize anxiety.** It is perfectly reasonable that children and adults feel some degree of anxiety at this time. No one knows how long this period will last, how bad it will get, whether their family and friends will be affected by COVID-19, or when jobs and school will come back to normal.

Reassure your child that experiencing some anxiety is a healthy, normal response to a situation like this, and help them learn how to cope with it.

**Offer guidance on what your child can do (or remind them of all that they *are* doing), to reinforce a greater sense of control.** If your child is feeling anxious about getting sick, or that you or your family members could get sick, reinforce that together, you are doing everything possible to stay healthy. This offers them a greater sense of control, which reduces anxiety.

### *Practicing daily good hygiene*

- Washing your hands multiple times a day for 20 seconds and immediately if you have been out in public spaces. When washing, sing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Happy Birthday” twice in about 20 seconds. Using hand sanitizer if you do not have soap and water available.
- Sneezing or coughing into the bend of your elbow. Or using a Kleenex and throwing it away immediately after using it.
- Only shaking hands and giving hugs to immediate family members, at least for now.

### *Building the immune system*

- Eating a balanced diet, getting adequate sleep, and exercise regularly which all helps to maintain a robust immune system to fight off illness.

**Stay calm, listen, and offer reassurance.** Be a role model. Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.

- **Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19.** Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Carefully listen or have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.
- **Explain social distancing.** Children probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Explain that while we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve" to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time—we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.

- **Demonstrate deep breathing.** Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children. Also, remind yourself to slow down. Practicing mindful pauses during the day can help you and your child have better emotional health in general. Mindfulness can also help you to feel calmer and regain perspective when things start to feel overwhelming. It can lead to being more patient, less reactive and therefore, more effective at practicing effective parenting. Some resources for mindfulness exercises are included on the resources slide.
- **Focus on the positive.** Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings or spend time being creative. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow and encourage older children to connect with their friends virtually.
- **Establish and maintain a daily routine.** Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being.
- **Offer lots of love and affection.** It contributes to their sense of self-worth and feelings of security.

**Monitor television viewing and social media.** Parents/guardians should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for themselves and their children. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

- Dispel rumors and inaccurate information. Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may include rumors and inaccurate information. Older children, in particular, may be accessing a great deal of information online and from friends that contains inaccuracies. Talk to your child about factual disease information. Tell them the steps that you are taking as a family to remain healthy and safe.
- Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

**Take time to talk.** Let your children's questions guide you. Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as important to your children's well-being. Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces anxiety and fear.

**Be honest and accurate.** Correct misinformation. Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears.

- Explain simple safety steps. Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces.
- Stay up to date on the facts. Go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> for additional factual information.

**Keep explanations age appropriate.** For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!

- Early elementary school children. Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people make every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."
- Upper elementary and early middle school children. This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading.
- Upper middle and high school students. Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.

**If your child exhibits significant changes in behavior, seek professional help.** Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors.

- Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.
  - **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
  - **Elementary school children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
  - **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

**Adapted from:**

- [www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19](http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19)
- [www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf)
- [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fchildren.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fchildren.html)

## **Handout D: Addressing Safety and Boundaries - When Your Kids Are Home Alone**

Of course, leaving a 12-year-old home alone and leaving a 17-year-old home alone are two different things. But no matter how old your children are, when you leave them home alone you'll want to think of two things: *safety and boundaries*.

***Children at Home Alone: Expect the Best but Prepare for the Worst.***

### **Safety**

Prepare your kids for the “what ifs” that probably won't but *could* happen.

*Leave your kids with at least one way of contacting you (or another adult if you cannot be contacted during your shift).*

Hopefully, they are able to call you, but if that's not possible, make sure they know who to call in the event of an emergency. If you don't have a landline at home, hopefully, your child has a cell phone. If not, it might be a good idea to purchase a cheap call-and-text-only cell phone with prepaid minutes. You can grab these at pretty much any store, WalMart, Walgreens, some grocery stores even have them.

Make a list of helpful phone numbers including: 911, phone numbers of trusted adults who can help your kids if something comes up and post it in an accessible place. Include your personal phone number and your work number, even if your kids have them memorized – sometimes memory goes out the window if your kids are anxious or scared. Program them into your child's phone if they are not there already and into your “house phone” if you have one.

If your children will be home for extended periods, you may want to let one or more of your trusted adults or even trusted neighbors know your children will be home alone and ask them to check in periodically.

*Establish some regular check-in times.*

For example, you'll call them at designated times to check in and make sure everything is okay. Make it a rule that they must answer calls and that an unanswered call would signify an emergency situation. Let them know what the consequences will be for not responding in a timely fashion. Besides your regular, scheduled calls, make some *random* calls if possible. This is also where neighbors and trusted adults can help out. Explain that check-ins are not because of a *lack of trust*, but because *you love them* and care about their safety.

*Instruct your kids on what to do in the case of unexpected situations:*

- There is a fire, or the alarm goes off.
- A delivery person or someone comes to the door.
- It sounds like someone is trying to get in.

- The power goes out.
- A major storm sweeps through.
- Toilet clogs, water leaks, and other common household problems.
- They get into squabbles or arguments with siblings.
- Friends know you're not home and want to come over.

Discuss how and when to use 911.

What situations warrant a call to you? What situations warrant an immediate call to 911?

As you have the in-depth *conversation* with your child – ask if *they* have any questions, anything they are afraid of or unsure about. Are there any situations or scenarios that *they* want clarity on? *They might have different concerns than the ones you thought about.*

Make sure there is enough food in the house that your kids can eat without a lot of preparation.

It is also helpful to give them limits on how much they can eat of what.

For example – eat all the snack food in this drawer that you want – this is what I have set aside for your lunch or dinner.

Set boundaries on appliances they are allowed to use, such as the microwave is permitted, the stove or oven is not.

Take necessary precautions with any medications (prescription or over-the-counter), alcohol, firearms, tobacco, car keys, lighters or matches.

Do not assume your teen will make wise choices if they are accessible. *Think of “childproofing” your house, but you’re “teen-proofing.”* Take items to work with you that you do not want your teen to access or lock the items up.

## **Boundaries**

Taking safety precautions like these helps protect kids from dangerous situations and outside threats when home alone. But what about protecting your kids from themselves? Even older teens still lack that fully developed prefrontal cortex in the brain that drives good decision-making. This is a biological developmental reality that parents of teens often forget. Their still-developing brains need the parental guardrails of routines, rituals, and consistency. In a word – *boundaries*.

Keep in mind, during this unique time, your kids are probably nervous, bored, stir-crazy, cabin-fevered, and hurting for some social time with friends. *They might be a little “different” during this time than the teen you are used to.*

Some things to consider when forming boundaries for kids at home:

Consider how you'll handle the issue of your kids' friends coming over to your house.

Besides it being a health risk (why we are quarantining in the first place), kids are generally less apt to respect your rules when their friends are there and you're not. *Whatever you decide, be firm. You are the parent.*

*Establish some boundaries with technology while you're away.*

This is a great time to revisit the parental controls on gaming consoles, televisions, cellphones, and other electronic devices. You might need to consider using monitoring or parental control software to help curb temptations for your kids.

One of the best things you can do to keep your child safe is to *keep them busy, i.e. productive!* If you are working outside the home, make sure they know what school work needs to be completed, what chores need to be done, how many pages they need to have read in a book, any fun or creative activities that you would like them to do. *Then keep them accountable when you get home.* Try your best to establish schedules, checklists, and routines for their day. *This is what your "check-in" phone calls will be checking in on.*

*Keep in mind that rules without relationship lead to rebellion.*

You have to have some *do's* to go with all the *don'ts*. If you continue to build your relationship with your kids in healthy ways *when you are home* – quality time, conversation, meaningful connection – it greatly increases the chances that they'll respect your rules and stay safe *when you aren't home*.

**Content adapted from:**

- <https://firstthings.org/what-to-do-when-you-have-to-work-and-leave-your-kids-at-home-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>

