

Finding & Nurturing Resiliency

Parenting in the Face of a Pandemic

The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a great road map for every caregiver and family supporting and teaching children of all ages. For those who work closely with children and families, these five protective factors can help enrich decision making, approaches to providing resources, and support at any time and any age.

- 1** Parental Resilience
- 2** Social Connections
- 3** Knowledge of parenting & child development
- 4** Concrete support in times of need
- 5** Social and emotional support in times of need

Now, more than ever it is important to shift focus to strengths and areas of resilience. Resiliencies, for caregivers and kids include qualities, factors, emotional strengths that help individuals manage stress effectively and continue functioning when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma.

This includes attributes like:

- The ability to use healthy coping skills
- The strength internally and externally to bounce back from life's challenges and times of struggle
- Being a creative and resourceful problem solver
- Trusting others, and developing relationships (even when it can be scary to do so)
- Keeping a positive attitude and outlook even during uncertain times
- Remaining open to receiving help and staying brave to ask for when it is needed for you and your family



As caregivers, our decision making, stress levels, the ways we cope and communicate all have short- and long-term impacts on children. Youngsters form perception and reasoning based off the information they gather from those around them: their social cues, emotional climate, tone, and responses. During times like these, when things seem out of control for us—we adults, who have peers with whom we can communicate, as well as the knowledge and ability process emotions and fears—children are fully reliant on caregivers for guidance, clarity, and reassurance.

First things first...

Self-care

- ▶ In order to be responsive to all the demands on your plate right now—home schooling, domestic responsibilities, childcare, meal prep, budget management, and working from home—it is vital that you take time for yourself when and where ever possible. This might include taking a brisk walk with your children or family, connecting with other parents on brief scheduled phone calls or video chats, and allowing yourself to participate in grounding activities with children like coloring or putting together a puzzle.
- ▶ Self-care also refers to ADLs: the Activities of Daily Living. In the day-to-day confinement of home, it's easy to skip showers, meals, water intake, and healthy sleep patterns. Make sure you are changing your clothing daily, grooming consuming enough water, stretching, setting a bed time for yourself, and limiting how much time you are spending on social media and devices.

Check in with yourself. During peak-stress times, use the HALT checklist to consider what it is **you** need most right now, to be the best you can for your family.

- ▶ **Hungry?**
What have you been eating? Are you having fresh produce, vegetables, and fruits? Or have you been consuming foods that make you tired like sugar, carbs, and caffeine?
- ▶ **Angry?**
Are you irritable and agitated during certain times of the day? Maybe you are a morning person; perhaps you're a night owl and find these hours best for getting work done. Are you using a schedule or allowing emotions and frustration to determine or disrupt your own sense of structure? During times like these, it is okay to be a bit more sensitive to frustrations and anxieties. Checking in with yourself can help you eliminate those things which are not driving your emotions and help identify the factors that are.
- ▶ **Lonely?**
We're all feeling isolated right now. Whether you are a single parent at home with children, partnered, or in a home with other loved ones, these times can feel distant and lonely. Make use of ways to connect. Come together and play games either virtually (online) or together at the dinner table. If you are disconnected physically and far from home base, schedule weekly or bi-weekly video chats with your support network. Let others know how you are feeling and plan to check in on others, too. Sometimes, by reaching out for support yourself, you are providing someone the opportunity to reach back, ending their feelings of loneliness as well as your own.
- ▶ **Tired?**
The worst tends to come out of each of us, parenting or not, when we are overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious. Healthy sleep hygiene, which includes getting enough sleep as well as avoiding over-sleeping, is important to any healthy routine. Every parent and every child

occasionally needs a time-out. If work is getting to you or if you feel things are piling up between work and home demands, give yourself permission to press pause. The same is true for children. Making use of break time, keeping a set 'recess' and nap schedule, and maintaining bedtime routines is a vital area of consistency and can give caregivers the breaks and time they need as well.

Provide support and unconditional regard for children.

- ▶ Talk with kids to gauge their current perspective and understanding of what is happening in their world. Help children compartmentalize feelings, fears, and imagination. Do so without minimizing their feelings; rather, you want to provide reassurance and clarity. Make sure the ideas and concepts, as well as the words you use, are age-appropriate. Encourage children to ask questions.
- ▶ Help kids to understand "How we can do our part." By providing children updates and information in a solution-focused lens, you are encouraging the behavior of good social stewards. For example, explain to children, "We are staying home and doing our part to stop the spread of germs to others." "We are wearing masks to keep the air clean and free of viruses so that we and others do not get sick."
- ▶ Use time at home as an opportunity to create wish lists in the home. With an abundance of time together, discover what activities, experiments, games, and projects your children would like to do.

Use your own resilience and coping skills to teach children. Home-schooling provides a great opportunity for interpersonal learning and skills building! Share your coping skills with your children and the suggestions you receive from your own supports in a kid-friendly presentation.

- Validate feelings and encourage children to list and describe the feelings and sensations they experience.
- Use counting to help level anxieties, anger, frustrations. By pausing and counting to ten forward and backwards, you teach children the discipline of taking a needed time out before lashing out.
- Use apps to teach breathing techniques and family-friendly grounding skills.
- Log onto YouTube for free kid- and family-friendly yoga and relaxation stretching lessons.
- Review the food groups, healthy recipes, and allow children to participate in cooking and cleaning to learn the importance of building healthy bodies, minds, and spaces.

While times have shifted and this is all very new, we may never again have this amount of time to be at home with our families to this degree again. Much of adult life is spent wishing there was more time: more time for work, new experiences, and quality time with loved ones. By taking time to pause and consider your strengths, as well as the values that can be found in the social-distancing experience, your perspective may shift and doors to family engagement may open.

Practice kindness and self-compassion. You will surely pass on lessons and skills that cannot be found in textbooks or video games.