

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>

8 GREAT WAYS TO PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING

BREATHING WITH BUBBLES

Hold out a bubble wand and take a deep breath in. Then, breathe out slowly and gently and watch the bubbles form and float around the room.



PINWHEEL BREATHING

Hold out a pinwheel and breathe slowly on the pinwheel to get it to spin. If you blow too harsh or too fast, it might not move. Slow, deep breaths get the pinwheel spinning around and around.

SMELL THE FLOWER AND BLOW OUT THE CANDLES

Pretend you are smelling a beautiful, fragrant flower. Take a deep breath in to fully take in the scent. Now pretend that in front of you is a birthday cake with lots of candles. Take a deep breath out to blow out all those candles. Practice breathing in the flower and blowing out the candles a couple of times.

SMELL AND COOL THE HOT CHOCOLATE

Pretend you have a piping hot cup of cocoa in your hands. You are excited to take a sip, but first you need it to cool down. You inhale the smell of the delicious hot chocolate and then blow slowly on it to cool it down.

ROCKET SHIP

Stand or sit upright and place your hands together in front of your chest like you are a rocket about to get ready for takeoff! Take a deep breath in and count down from five. When you get to 0, blast off into space by lifting your hands in an upward motion until your arms are straight up above your head. Add a whooshing sound to your rocket as you take off by exhaling aloud!

DRAGON BREATHING

Take a deep breath in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. As you breathe out, attempt to do a small dragon roar. You can even move your arms like dragon wings as you breathe in and out!

STUFFED ANIMAL BREATHING

Lay down and place a stuffed animal on your belly. Take a few deep breaths in and out and watch your belly move the stuffed animal up and down.

BACK TO BACK BREATHING

Find a partner and sit on the ground with your backs pressed together. Sit upright and tall and take a deep breath in and slowly exhale. Your partner should feel you breathing on the other side. Now practice breathing in and out at the same time and try to synchronize your breaths.

Recommended books:

Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing by Christopher Willard, Daniel Rechtschaffen, & Holly Clifton-Brown

Bee Calm: The buzz on yoga by Frank J. Sileo

Breathe by Ines Castel-Branco

Peaceful Piggy Meditation by Kerry Lee MacLean

Recommended resources:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>

<https://nfrc.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/DeepBreathingforChildren.pdf>

RESILIENCE BUILDING: COPING SKILLS

Grounding is an activity that brings your attention to the present moment. One of the best and most readily available ways to do that is to use your five senses (see, touch, hear, smell, and taste). Have your child fill out the questions below to help manage big emotions.



WHAT ARE FIVE THINGS YOU SEE IN THIS ROOM?

WHAT ARE FOUR THINGS YOU FEEL?

WHAT ARE THREE THINGS YOU HEAR?

WHAT ARE TWO THINGS YOU SMELL?

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU TASTE?

RESOURCES

Visit [CHOC.org/CoronaVirus](https://www.choc.org/CoronaVirus) for more Resilience Tools

RESILIENCE BUILDING: FAMILY COPING BOX

A coping box includes tools that different family members can utilize when feeling stressed. It can include items that feel soft, taste good, or smell soothing. Encourage your child to use the box when they are starting to feel agitated, stressed, sad, mad or restless.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED



Shoe Box



Glue



Construction Paper, Stickers, or other
Decorative Items



Coping Items

INSTRUCTIONS

1. GRAB THE SHOE BOX AND DECORATE THE OUTSIDE WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY

2. HAVE EVERY MEMBER OF THE FAMILY COLLECT A COPING ITEM OR TWO.

These things could be:

- Soft stuffed animal
- Word searches
- Pleasant-smelling candle or lotion
- Chewing gum
- List of songs that bring joy
- Fidget toys
- Printable of breathing exercises

3. PLACE THE BOX WHERE EVERYONE CAN ACCESS IT EASILY.

RESOURCES

Visit [CHOC.org/CoronaVirus](https://www.choc.org/CoronaVirus) for more Resilience Tools

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS WITH CHILDREN

Mindfulness is a powerful tool to help us slow down, pay attention and be fully present in the moment. Below is a list of fun and creative ways to teach your child mindfulness:

MAKE YOUR WALKS MINDFUL

Take a “noticing” walk with your child and try to notice things you haven’t paid attention to before. Use your 5 senses and identify what you see, hear, feel, and smell around you. Designate the first minute of your walk as “silent walking” and pay attention to all that is around you and then come together to discuss the things you noticed.



MINDFUL MANTRAS

Mantras are helpful when we need to calm ourselves down and bring ourselves back into the present moment. Create a list of phrases that you and your child can repeat silently as you take a deep breath. Here are some examples:

I am thankful.
Let it go.
I will be okay.
This too shall pass.
With change comes opportunity.

MINDFUL COLORING

Print out some coloring pages and practice coloring mindfully. Teach them to practice deep breathing as they color.

PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING

Eat a snack mindfully. Or, maybe just the first bite of a snack! For example, if the snack is an apple slice, have your child examine the apple as if they are an alien from outer space seeing an apple slice for the first time. What does it look like? What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Does light shine through it? Take a small bite but don’t swallow just yet. What is this bite like? Chew slowly. Take it all in. Talk about that bite afterward. What are new things they have discovered about the apple?

BRING MINDFUL AWARENESS OF ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

We can practice bringing our mindful attention to daily activities that are often performed mindlessly. Pick one of these activities to serve as your “Call to mindfulness” during the day: brushing teeth, taking a shower, drinking tea/coffee, eating a meal, getting out of bed, getting dressed, waiting in line, turning on your computer, opening a book to read, washing dishes, folding laundry, getting into bed.

PRACTICE MINDFUL MEDITATION

The loving-kindness meditation is a powerful meditation of sending positive thoughts and wishes to yourself and others. Close your eyes, imagine the person or pet you care about and say aloud or silently, “*May you be safe. May you be healthy and strong. May you be happy. May you be peaceful and at ease.*” These wishes can also be sent to yourself. Have your child pick four wishes they would like to send and practice saying these with them.

Recommended books:

A world of pausabilities: An exercise in mindfulness by Frank J. Sileo
Bee Calm: The buzz on yoga by Frank J. Sileo
Bee Calm: An invitation to meditation by Frank J. Sileo
Breathe by Ines Castel-Branco
Peaceful Piggy Meditation by Kerry Lee MacLean
Relaxations: Big tools for little warriors by Mamen Duch

Resources:

Calm app
Headspace app

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE

ESTABLISH A GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Make a list of all the things you are grateful for today. For example, “I am grateful that we didn’t hit traffic on our drive to school” or “I am grateful for the good weather we are having.” Try to practice gratitude for all the little things that occur during the day that people tend to overlook, but can make a difference.



CREATE A GRATITUDE CUE

Pair gratitude with a symbol. For example, every time you see an airplane, you have to think of one thing you are grateful for. This will help reinforce the practice of gratitude throughout your day.

WRITE A THANK YOU CARD

Once a week write a thank you card for someone you are feeling grateful for, whether it is a teacher, pediatrician, librarian, or a family member.

GRATITUDE TRADITION

Create a gratitude tradition in your home and get others involved. Whether it is going around the dinner table and having each family member say 1 thing they are grateful for or writing down 3 things you are grateful for in your journal before bed.

ALPHABET GRATITUDE

Write down each letter of the alphabet and come up with one thing you are grateful for based on each letter. For example, B can be for books if you have a lot of books that you enjoy reading, or S can be for sunsets because it is your favorite time of the day.

GRATITUDE JAR

Place an empty jar on your desk with strips of blank paper next to it. Every time you remember or reflect on something you are grateful for, write it down and put it in the jar. Every once in awhile, read all your appreciative thoughts.

Recommended books:

Grow Grateful by Sage Foster-Lasser and Jon Lasser
Grow Kind by Jon Lasser and Sage Foster-Lasser
Grow Happy by Jon Lasser and Sage Foster-Lasser
Bee Heartful: Spreading Loving-Kindness by Frank J. Sileo

Recommended resources:

<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

MOOD BOOSTER JAR

A mood booster jar holds strips of paper with encouraging statements that friends or family members have written about you. Place this jar somewhere visible and whenever you're having a tough day, pull out a strip of paper to get some love and encouragement.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 1 Empty Jar, small box, or container
- Markers or pens
- Tape or glue
- Construction paper cut into strips
- Decorative items like stickers or ribbons
- Scissors to cut the construction paper into strips



INSTRUCTIONS

1. **GATHER THE FAMILY OR A GROUP OF CLOSE FRIENDS AND PROVIDE THEM EACH WITH A JAR**
2. **EACH PERSON LABELS THEIR JAR WITH THEIR NAME AND DECORATES IT AS THEY WISH**
3. **EVERYONE CUT THE SHEETS OF CONSTRUCTION PAPER INTO STRIPS**
4. **ON SEPARATE STRIPS OF PAPER, EACH PERSON WRITES AT LEAST 5 POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT EACH OTHER AND PLACES IT IN EACH OTHER'S INDIVIDUAL JARS. SOME INSPIRATION CAN INCLUDE:**
 - a. A famous or inspirational quote that reminds you of this person
 - b. What do you appreciate about them?
 - c. Why are you grateful for this person?
 - d. What is a positive or funny memory that you have with this person?
 - e. What are some of their strengths or things that they are uniquely good at?
5. **AFTERWARD, EACH PERSON CAN TAKE TURNS SHARING WHAT EVERYONE WROTE ABOUT THEM IN THEIR JAR IF THEY'D LIKE, OR THEY CAN KEEP IT A SURPRISE FOR WHEN THEY ARE NEEDING THAT EXTRA BOOST ON A DIFFICULT DAY**

Recommended books:

Grow Grateful by Sage Foster-Lasser and Jon Lasser
 Grow Kind by Jon Lasser and Sage Foster-Lasser
 Grow Happy by Jon Lasser and Sage Foster-Lasser
 Bee Heartful: Spreading Loving-Kindness by Frank J. Sileo

Recommended resources:

<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>