



Mental Health Tips for Parents

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, children and teens have been struggling with increased anxiety and depression. But many parents and caregivers are struggling too – and to be there for their child, they need to take care of their own mental health. May is mental health awareness month, a time to focus on the importance of ways to find support in times of stress and anxiety.

Here are 8 mental health tips for parents.

1. Focus on your relationship with your child – and don't worry about the other stuff.

Your family is going through a stressful time, and as a parent, you may feel like you need to keep everything together, from school to work to sports, to meal planning. But it's impossible not to let something slide. So focus on what's most important: your child's well-being, and their connection with you.

In other words, if your child is having a hard time at school this year, don't worry so much about their grades. Focus, instead, on their mental health and well-being. Youth will actually perform better in school when there is less achievement-focused pressure.

2. Give yourself permission to do a "good enough" job as a parent.

Recognize that your "best" right now may be different from prior expectations for yourself, whether that's your child's screen time or your family meal-planning. That's okay. Use this moment in time to model how important it is to be balanced. Be aware of not setting unrealistic goals for yourself or your child.

3. Stop the comparisons.

Every family's journey during this pandemic has been unique. Don't compare your family's experience to anyone else's, and don't measure yourself as a parent against anyone else. Have compassion for yourself.

4. Forget "should."

Instead of thinking about how social media or other influences say you "should" be, focus on the kind of parent you would like to be. This simple shift in mindset can cut through the noise and foster a relationship to your child at a much deeper level.

5. When stress is getting the better of you, pause.

If you are in a situation where you might react to your child with intensity or hostility, pause. Take a breath, and go to a separate space until you can react with control. An intense or hostile reaction will never help. It could, however, hurt your connection with your child. Unless your child is in danger, your best reaction may be no reaction.

6. Tag in a trusted helper.

This could be your child's sibling, therapist, guidance counselor, teacher, clergy, family friend, or another parent. It's okay to say, "I'm noticing that my child is really struggling, but I'm having a hard time connecting with them because of how overwhelmed I am. Can I ask you to talk with them, play a game with them or take them for a walk?"

7. Practice self-care.

Self care does not have to be a spa day or a trip to the beach. It can be closing the door and removing yourself from an argument. Find small opportunities to sustain yourself each day. You'll be setting a great example for your child for how to practice self-care.

8. Get mental health support.

For your child to be able to come to you, your own tank can't be empty. If you're struggling, the greatest gift you can give to your child is to seek mental health support for yourself. Telehealth services have created more access than ever before. Please don't give up at finding someone to help.