



COVID-19 RESPONSE

PARENTING INFANTS & TODDLERS THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Tips and resources for parents of infants and toddlers during the pandemic.

While being homebound allows children to spend more time with family members, other aspects of this change may cause stress or anxiety. Familiar routines may be disrupted, physical activity limited and eating and sleeping patterns may have shifted. Children may be confused about what is happening and why. Big feelings like fear and frustration may be expressed in behavior when children don't have the words or know how to talk about what they are feeling. Below are some tips that may help during this difficult time.

1. Keep their routine as normal as possible.

Infants and toddlers thrive when they have regular and predictable routines. Routines also help parents feel a sense of control and normalcy in their day. If you have already established routines around nap times, meal times, bath times and bedtimes, then keep them! Your

children expect and depend on them. While infants and toddlers may not be as aware of what is going on as older children might be, they certainly will notice if routines are disrupted. Having consistent nap and bedtimes also can help parents build in some time for working, household management and self-care.

2. Promote social interaction at home and online.

Parents can facilitate safe social interaction even while homebound. This can be done through planned family activities and opportunities to have fun and make memories together. Remember, you are the most important person in the world to your young child. Even something as simple as going on a drive and talking about what you see or playing games like "I spy" can be an exciting and safe activity for toddlers.

Keep your child in contact with family members, teachers or other important people in their lives. If your



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baby regularly spent time with another family member or close friend before this time, allow them to stay connected through phone calls or video chats. Grandmas and Grandpas love their grandkids – they may need this interaction even more than your child.

3. Encourage active play and exercise.

There are many things parents can do to help their children be active throughout the day at home. These could include going on walks together or playing in a safe place outdoors. Even letting your child help out with simple chores like sorting the socks, wiping floors or dusting and sweeping can get them moving. Setting up a toy washing station for their plastic toys also can be a fun and productive activity for toddlers.

Ideas for helping your toddler be active if they do not have a safe place to play outside include doing exercises together like jumping jacks, watching kid workout or dance videos together (see Additional References) or doing a scavenger hunt throughout your home. Rhythmic activities that include clapping, moving and dancing also are excellent for helping children get their wiggles out while indoors. It also is a good idea to rotate toys and activities to keep things exciting.

4. Accept that their behavior may slide back a little bit.

It is realistic to expect that your infant or toddler may take a step back in their development for a time. Despite your best efforts, it is likely their routine is going to be changed in some way, whether that is an older sibling taking away some of their one-on-one time with mom or dad, or parents needing to work during what was normally play time.

Parents can be responsive and sensitive to their children's needs by understanding reactions to the pandemic may vary. Some young children may demand extra attention; become extra clingy or irritable; or experience disruptions in sleeping patterns, eating and toileting. Behavioral

changes might be in response to changes in the mood or attitudes of the parent, and the parent might not even recognize it. While it may be difficult, try to maintain a positive outlook and practice patience with your child. It will aid in their wellbeing during and beyond this time. Remember, this is temporary. Difficult behaviors are natural responses for infants and toddlers, and adults can help their children move through them by remaining calm and patient.

5. Make a plan for when you need to work.

For parents who are working from home during this time, be clear about limits that will be set around when you have to work. Make a plan for what your children will be doing while you are working. A few suggestions for what parents can do to make those hours easier include:

- a. trade off working time with a spouse or partner
- b. work during nap and bedtimes and
- c. create a safe place for your toddler to play that is within your sight.

Doing a little bit of extra child-proofing can go a long way in preventing accidents.

While screen time is not typically recommended for young children, it may be appropriate to put on a movie or educational show to keep your child entertained when you need to work. If you need to rely on screens regularly during working time, be sure to balance this time with one-on-one time with your child.



6. Understand that your toddlers may have questions.

While very young children may not understand what is going on, they will get a sense that things are different. Creating an environment where children feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their concerns can make a big difference. It is important to talk with them and answer their questions, but keep information within their level of

understanding. Reassure and let them know you will do all that you can to keep them safe.

7. Take care of yourself.

Self-care is not selfish – it is how you can keep yourself grounded so you are physically, mentally and emotionally capable of being there for your young child. If you begin feeling overwhelmed, put your infant or young child in a safe play pen or ask another adult to watch them while you take a brief time out for yourself. Take deep, calming breaths and, if possible, walk around the house or yard continuing to breathe deeply until you are ready to re-engage calmly. It helps children feel safe and secure when they see you are calm.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Talking to your child about COVID-19:

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Helping children cope during emergencies:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>

Tips and activities for video chats:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2535-five-tips-to-make-the-most-of-video-chats>

Helping children and parents destress during the Coronavirus:

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-you-and-your-kids-can-de-stress-during-coronavirus>

At-home activities for kids:

<https://time.com/5803373/coronavirus-kids-at-home-activities/>

Dance and exercise YouTube channels for kids:

Go Noodle: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2YB-T7HYqCbbvzu3kKZ3wnw>

Cosmic Kids: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

The Kiboomers: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLy6-72NzYpFztbJ7jNEMkg>

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