



PARTNERING FOR RESILIENCE

Together We Thrive



Combating COVID-19 With Resilience

With the global pandemic of COVID-19 hitting the US, we are faced with the most sweeping crisis in recent memory and call for both empathy and action to guide us through these uncertain times. As we witness the rapid spread of this virus, we have observed and experienced the simultaneous spread of worry, anxiety, and instability.

When faced with a crisis some people languish and fall into a downward spiral, while others tap into resources to change, grow, and bounce back from adversity. At the heart of this difference is resilience. It implies both strength and flexibility, the power to bend, but not break.

Overnight, parents were tasked with the responsibility of balancing work, child-care and self-care while keeping concerns about their family's health and well-being under control. Change affects people differently, bringing a unique flood of thoughts, strong emotions and uncertainty. Some are improvising with little worry, while many others are finding the task daunting, wondering how they will ever be able to work from home and find time to take care of and help teach their children. This anxiety may be experienced at a greater degree for our parents who have children with special needs.

This weekly newsletter is created by GUSD School Psychologists to share insights to help you as parents support the needs of our students at home with hopes to not only respond to this crisis, but recover and thrive. We hope this weekly resource will help get you through these difficult circumstances and also empower you to grow and improve your life and the life of your children along the way.

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. While we don't know where and to what extent the disease may spread here in the United States, we do know that it is contagious, that the severity of illness can vary from individual to individual, and that there are steps we can take to prevent the spread of infection. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm. It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.



REMAIN CALM AND REASSURING

Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reaction.

What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.

If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.

Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.

Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.

It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.

Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.



ENGAGE YOUR CHILD

Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.

Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.



MONITOR TELEVISION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.

Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.

Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.

Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

AVOID EXCESSIVE BLAMING

When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone.

It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.

Bullying or negative comments made toward others should be stopped and reported to the school.

Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different than the values that you have at home.



HYGIENE & BASIC LIFESTYLE



BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.

Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.

Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to protect yourself.

Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection

Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spread of illness:

Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds (singing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star slowly takes about 20 seconds).

Cover their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough and throw away the tissue immediately, or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Do not share food or drinks.

Practice giving fist or elbow bumps instead of handshakes. Fewer germs are spread this way.

Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over disease spread and will help to reduce their anxiety.

Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a strong immune system to fight off illness.

TAKE TIME TO TALK



You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

When sharing information, it is important to make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves.

Information is rapidly changing about this new virus—to have the most correct information stay informed by accessing [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov).

KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE APPROPRIATE

Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and 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 take 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 will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.

Upper middle school and high school students are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

POINTS TO EMPHASIZE WHEN TALKING TO CHILDREN

Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.

Not everyone will get the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.

It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO STAY HEALTHY & AVOID SPREADING THE DISEASE

Avoid close contact with people who are sick

Stay home when you are sick.

Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Wash hands often with soap and water (20 seconds).

If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer (60–95% alcohol based).

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

BREATH

"Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one."

FEELING ANXIOUS

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.

Fear and anxiety about this disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in children. The following are some symptoms of anxiety to watch for:

PRESCHOOLERS Thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.

ELEMENTARY 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.

Preschoolers

TIPS TO MANAGE ANXIETY



- Establish a routine to gain a new sense of "normal."
- Keep morning and bedtime schedules similar to when they are in school.
- Use visual supports to help your child transition from one activity to the next. See Page 16 of this Newsletter for the Easterseals link to access a wide variety of printable visuals.
- Allow plenty of time for play.
- Incorporate daily mindfulness or breathing exercises.
- Allow for opportunities to connect with others through various media platforms.
- Ask for help. You are not alone. Staff is available to assist you.



Resources

FOR PRESCHOOLERS

Links to help you talk about the Coronavirus with your preschooler and other resources for parenting young children during this time:

[*Answering your young child's questions about the virus*](#)

[*Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus*](#)

[*Why Are People Wearing Masks? Why Are People Covering their Faces?*](#)

[*At Home Activity Guide*](#)

[*Staying Connected While Separated from young Children*](#)



Elementary

SCHOOL STUDENTS

From Stop, Breathe, and Think, here are a host of mindfulness activities for ages 4-10 that you can do to bring more kindness and compassion into your home. The following activities help address a specific emotion to work through these feelings together.

FEELING ANXIOUS

For a lot of our team members, we're feeling the anxiety rising, especially as parents. We've had kids describe anxiety as a sense of butterflies in the stomach, or having a hard time falling asleep because the mind can't stop thinking. Rather than get caught up in worried thoughts or feelings, kids can focus their attention on something they can do to address their emotions, like these activities here:



[Bulldog Weathers The Storm](#)

To weather your emotions



[Bulldog and The Pink Bubble](#)

To use your imagination to let go of worries



[Periwinkle Listens](#)

Wonderful way to shift attention when stressed



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.

FEELING RESTLESS

Being stuck at home, kids may have a lot of energy they just don't know what to do with! Here are two ways for everyone to use their bodies and all of their senses to work off some energy:



Squeeze & Let Go

To breathe, squeeze & let go



Sense Superpowers

To pretend you're different animals with awesome abilities



Yoga for Kids

To get the wiggles out



The Stop, Breathe & Think team is offering ongoing opportunities to connect LIVE via their Facebook channel—using this time at home as an opportunity to dive deeper into mindfulness practices to keep us healthy and at peace.

Every Tuesday at 12pm PDT/3pm EDT, they will host a live guided meditation led by favorite narrators from their app.

Every Thursday at 10am PDT/1pm EDT, they will host a live family mindfulness activity parents and children can do together.

FEELING ANGRY OR ANNOYED

If your child is feeling frustrated by someone or something, they might want to scream or yell or lose their cool. When big emotions come up, these activities can help kids cool down:



Deep Dive

To find your peaceful place



Periwinkle's Party

Is great to find the good when things don't go as planned



Bulldog Finds His Quiet Place

So you can learn to take slow, deep breaths



Adolescents

"QUARANTEENAGERS"

A Popular Meme Currently Circulating on Social Media

"Dear Class of 2020, You entered the world during 9/11. You graduate during a pandemic. No doubt these events will shape you. You see beyond borders and political parties. You savor the good. The celebrations may need to wait, and you are OK with that. We are proud of you!"

Are they really ok with that?



Make Space for Disappointment and Sadness

Make Space for Relief and Joy

Expect Friction Regarding Their Social Lives

Allow Privacy and Time Alone

Treat Teenagers with Respect and as Problem-Solving Partners

This is an especially challenging time for teenagers. In addition to experiencing anxiety about Covid-19, teenagers also have every right to be sad, angry and frustrated about what has become of their school year. Teenagers are missing out on major rites of passage such as graduation, prom and visiting colleges. Resist the urge to minimize their worry, anger and sadness. They are grieving and need to be allowed to feel the pain of the loss. They have every right to these feelings. Offering compassion paves their way toward feeling understood.

With most families at home, parents have the unique opportunity to slow down and be present in a new way and keep a vigilant eye out for signs of depression and anxiety.

Though we can't replace what's been lost, adults should not underestimate the power of offering empathy to disheartened adolescents.

Adolescents

"QUARANTEENAGERS"

Ask Questions and Listen Closely to Answers

With kids home from school, most adults working remotely, and families staying close to home, families are spending more time together. With the reduction in extracurricular activities there's more opportunity for conversations, for connection, and to observe and monitor our teens. For parents, this is an important time to tune into your teens mental health and well-being. Ask open ended questions, and listen carefully to the answers. Pay attention to what teens say, and what they do not as well as their general mood and attitude. You may learn about issues that you haven't noticed before.

Limit Exposure to News

While it's important for teens to understand what's going on in the world, too much information can exacerbate anxiety and fear. Help them choose responsible media sources.

Create Unplugged Activities for Teenagers

Virtual communication feels more essential now than ever. In the absence of daily interaction with peers, kids may feel the need to digitally interact more with friends in order to feel connected. That said, too much time online for some, may enhance symptoms of mental health issues. Build offline activities for teenagers into their daily schedule.

Get Outside if Possible

If you have a backyard where you can walk around, get outdoors as much as possible. Time in nature helps mood and immune-system function, and physical activities for teenagers can reduce symptoms of depression.

Use the Meal as Medicine

Because we are cooking and eating at home, this is a great time to make healthy meals for teens and the whole family. Teens may enjoy planning meals, cooking, or baking. Cooking and sharing food can be a creative and a healing experience.



PRACTICING

MINDFULNESS

WHAT IS IT?

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. It suggests that the mind is fully attending to what's happening, to what you're doing, to the space you're moving through. Mindfulness is a quality that every human being possesses and may need to learn how to access it or to cultivate it.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO ANXIETY?

Mindfulness suggests that the mind is fully attending to what's happening, to what you're doing, to the space you're moving through. That might seem trivial, except for the fact that we so often veer from the matter at hand. Our mind takes flight, we lose touch with our body, and pretty soon we're engrossed in obsessive thoughts about something that just happened or fretting about the future. And that makes us anxious.





Remember

WHEN PRACTICING MINDFULNESS WITH KIDS, IT WILL ALMOST NEVER GO AS PLANNED

- Check in every day with yourself and your family. Encourage your family at meal time or before bed to share how they are feeling mentally, physically, and emotionally. You can even use our app to check-in with how you're feeling together.
- Allow your kids to experience mindfulness their own way. We recommend that you encourage your children to try meditation or mindful games, rather than insisting or forcing it. Doing these activities with them is a great way to inspire participation. Whether your child is being uncooperative or distracted, or if they're fully engaged and happy to be playing a mindful game, either way, allow them to experience their own journey.
- Approach the activities with openness and curiosity. While it might seem like there's a "right" way to practice mindfulness, the good news is that there's actually no way to get it wrong! The experience is different for everyone. Notice how you feel in the moment without necessarily trying to change anything or judge what you observe. You may feel more settled after an activity; you also may not. Both are normal and okay.
- Learn to be with whatever's happening. With mindfulness, it can be tempting to "fix" a problem, yet we're here to remind you to "let go" of any agendas or goals. It's actually more supportive to learn how to be kind and compassionate with yourself – especially with whatever thoughts or feelings that come up – and the more you can accept whatever is happening wholeheartedly in moments of mindfulness, the more you can bring that approach to all experiences in your life.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

Helpful Tips



Daily Schedule

Begin by implementing a daily schedule. The most important thing parents or caregivers can do to help a child cope during these uncertain times is to create a routine or schedule. It helps kids know what to expect and helps with any stress the unknown can cause.

Click the following link to download the Easterseals School Closure Toolkit. This toolkit includes visual supports (e.g., schedules, token boards) that will help you structure your child's day at home and increase your child's independence.

[https://l.ead.me/bbTE3n -School Closure Toolkit \(Download the PDF!\)](https://l.ead.me/bbTE3n-School Closure Toolkit (Download the PDF!))

EASTERSEALS SCHOOL CLOSURE TOOLKIT

**INCLUDES SCHEDULES,
TOKEN BOARDS,
FIRST/THEN BOARDS,
ACTIVITIES AND MANY
OTHER RESOURCES.**



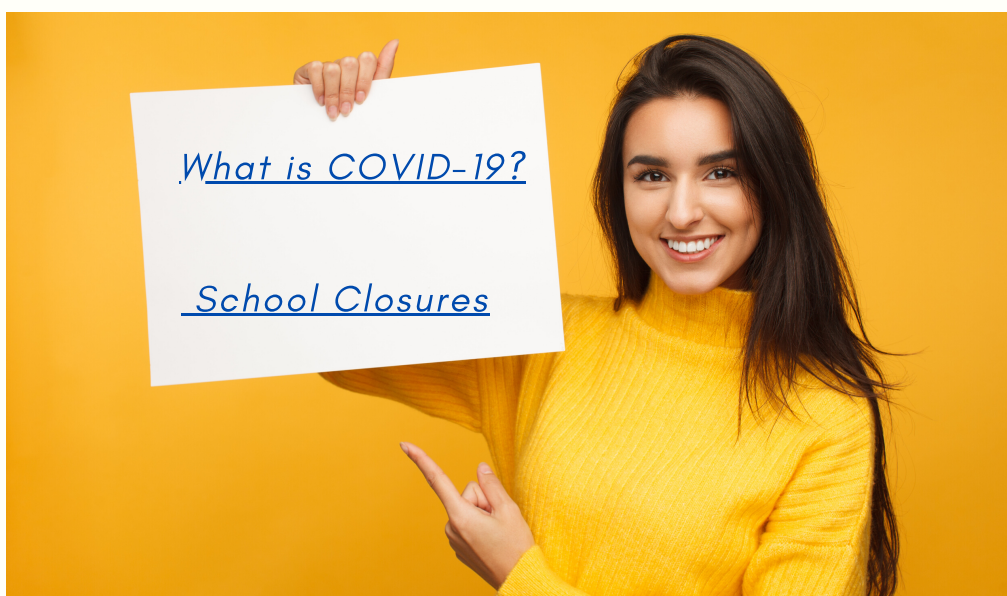
SOCIAL STORIES



Social stories are individualized short stories that depict a social situation that your child may encounter. These social stories are used to teach through the use of precise and sequential information that your child may find difficult or confusing, thus preventing further anxiety on the part of your child.

If you are having a difficult time explaining to your child what COVID-19 is or why you are asking him/her to stay home from school, please refer to the two social story links below to help you discuss the current situation with your children.

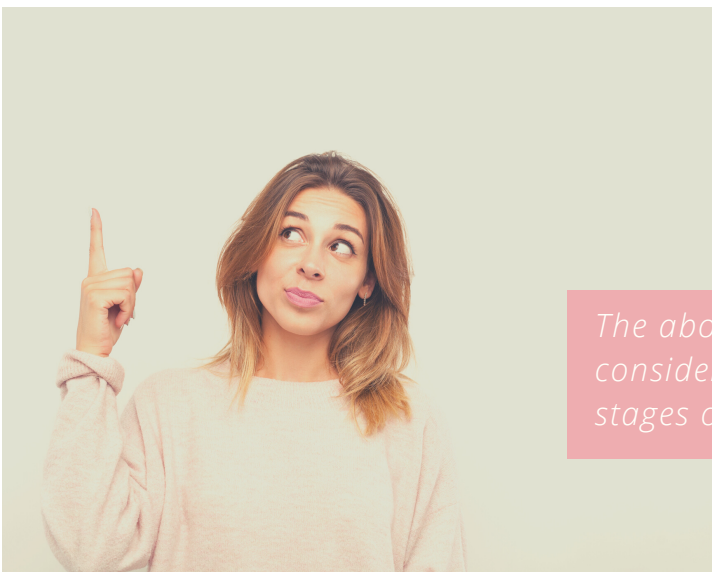
SOCIAL STORY LINKS



HELP WITH TANTRUMS



[NASP Temper Tantrum Helping Handout](#)



Due to being cooped up in the house for days on end, families may be experiencing a dramatic increase in behavioral outbursts (tantrums) at home. Tantrums challenge parents to adapt and create new rules and home schedules to better support the well-being of ALL family members. Please follow the NASP link for simple strategies that may help to prevent and manage typical tantrum behaviors in children at home.

The above link will discuss why it's important to consider the developmental level, the triggers and stages of a temper tantrum.

IN TIMES OF CRISIS MAKE TIME FOR WELLNESS

Self-Care for Parents & Caregivers



Parents and caregivers constantly put their child's needs above their own, especially if their child has special needs. This health crisis has turned everyone's life upside down. It's created anxiety, uncertainty, and stress, and it has forced us into new routines as we're together 24/7. However, it's important for parents and caregivers to prioritize their personal needs and engage in self-care of your mind, body, and spirit.

After all, how are you expected to care for others if you don't take care of yourself? As you juggle multiple roles and responsibilities during this challenging time, here are a few things to try now, but also to continue when better times finally emerge.

MAKE "ME" TIME

It's easy to get overwhelmed with everybody else's needs that you forget to make time for yourself. You may feel guilty that if you take any time for yourself, your child will feel neglected. However, remember that anxiety can lower your immune system, and when you feel refreshed, you will be in a better emotional and physical state to parent your children with the support they need. Try to set aside some "me" time everyday to help you unwind. Simple things you can do after your child is occupied or asleep: give yourself a homemade facial or take a relaxing bath; read a book or magazine; make calls to your close friends or connect via social media; bake; paint; listen to music; dance; exercise; go for walks outside; meditate; journal; go through old photo albums; watch a movie; play with your dog; make a bucket list of all the things you want to do after this crisis is over!



5 Minute Self-Care Ideas:

<http://www.theartofpureliving.com/5-minute-self-care-ideas-for-when-you-are-overwhelmed/>



THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS

With all the dire news coming at us constantly, your mind may become overrun with negative emotions. We have to remember that without joy during our daily lives, there is more room for stressful and anxious thoughts. Find ways to bring a little joy and some distraction from repetitive thoughts about our current crisis by thinking proactively about things you can do with this enforced time at home: get back in touch with hobbies or activities you enjoy but rarely had time for, make the choice to learn a new skill, or find a DIY project or craft to do with your child.

It's also important that your mind have multiple breaks throughout the day so your thoughts are not obsessively focused on the health crisis. You of course need to be informed of what's going on, but consider limiting your (and your children's) exposure to the unending news cycle, or balance the distressing information with positive news from around the world. Yoga and mindfulness activities can help fortify your body and mind by keeping stress levels low and your immune system healthy.

There are many free yoga sessions on YouTube for all skill levels.



Free Mindfulness Meditations:

<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>



MAKE MEALS MEANINGFUL

This is a great opportunity to make eating at home a positive experience. Have your child help you plan a menu. To cut back on going to the grocery store, look in your pantry, find some ingredients and google what meals can be made with what you have. Your child can even help you in preparing the meal. They can wash some vegetables, pour ingredients in a bowl, stir, etc. When dinner is ready, eat together and share the day's experience. Go around the table and ask "What was your favorite part of the day?" You'll be surprised at some of their answers. Be creative, make a picnic in the middle of your living room, wear funny hats to the table, or have everyone eat with their opposite hand. After dinner, play a game together. Use this time together to develop memories. Your children are only young once.

MAKING HEALTH AND NUTRITION A PRIORITY

<https://nutrition.org/making-health-and-nutrition-a-priority-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic/>

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR YOURSELF

Being a parent has always been a challenge, but now many working parents essentially have two full-time jobs contemporaneously. The situation is much harder for parents with younger children and/or if they are caring for a child with special needs without any support. We need to set realistic goals and not become overwhelmed with the desire for perfection. Do not worry if your schedules or plans do not go as smoothly as planned or if your child is not following all the directions. Remember that you are doing the best you can during a very difficult time. Practice forgiveness and be kind to yourself. Stop, take a deep breath, and tell yourself, you are "doing a good job."



42 Affirmations to Change Your Life:

<https://selflovecircle.co.uk/42-affirmations-that-will-change-your-life/>



IT'S OKAY TO SET LIMITS AND SAY "NOT RIGHT NOW"

Your time and energy are being pulled in multiple directions. You have children and possibly elderly parents that you must care for, but it's okay to prioritize and let them know that those nonessential things won't be taken care of today.

Now that you may be working from home, you're still accountable to employers and colleagues and it's easy to work nonstop throughout the day since work and home are blended together. It's okay to establish designated "work hours" and resist the urge to check emails after work hours.

Friends may need your emotional support, and you may unknowingly take on the burden of their anxiety as you feel the need to respond to every text, call, post, or shared piece of news. Let them know you care, but it's okay to practice some emotional distancing until your own "emotional reserves" are back to optimal levels.

7 Essential Tips for Working from Home During the Coronavirus
[Pandemic:https://www.themuse.com/advice/coronavirus-work-from-home-tips](https://www.themuse.com/advice/coronavirus-work-from-home-tips)

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Ways to Avoid Compassion Fatigue:
<http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/exercises/ways-to-avoid-compassion-fatigue.pdf>

And most importantly, if you are feeling overwhelmed, distressed, in crisis, and need someone to talk to, please seek support and help immediately:



The Crisis Text Line: Text TALK to 741741
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK