

# THE NEW GUIDE TO PARENTING @ HOME (DURING COVID-19)

Every day, we get another reminder that there is not a definitive guide to being a parent – especially in challenging times. Yet, the reality is that many parents are experiencing similar things while trapped inside the home. What can be fun one day, can be maddening the next. And, for the foreseeable future, we are all stuck together, sheltered in place. It is time to embrace positivity and make the best of it – what happens during these days, weeks, months will last a lifetime in memories.

## THE BASICS

- 1. Family matters.** This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to re-prioritize family and time together.
- 2. Reestablish expectations.** Setting ground rules for each other sets a clear expectation for not only the children, but also the adults and holds everyone accountable to each other.
- 3. Embrace relationships.** We will rely on technology to get us through and keep us connected to the outside world, but it is the real human relationships that will endure. We must make them a priority.
- 4. Everyone is struggling.** Plan for the ups and downs that chaos and changing routine brings. We have different struggles and needs, but recognize they are real, especially for our children.
- 5. Eliminate judgment.** Work on not placing judgment on others or yourself – embrace where you are in the moment and keep thinking forward instead of in the past.

## THE NEW NECESSITIES

- 1. Set the family schedule.** Setting expectations is important for everyone in the house. Children have school time, play time and free time. And, parents have work time or time to rethink their future. By setting the schedule, no one has to feel guilty or inadequate about what they are doing or not doing. The schedule will also incorporate new tasks and changing responsibilities so that everyone has some variety in pitching in each week.

*Try this: Set a weekly calendar with defined times for family as well as individual responsibilities and fun.*

- 2. Individualize workspaces.** Whether it is a tiny apartment or a sprawling house, where everyone congregates and how they work will need new and greater definition. It is important to be intentional with children about their spaces – help them create safe spaces to study and fun places for fun. You may consider different areas for different subjects or simply changing design elements in the same space to mix up the energy. Their classrooms are set up with many different learning stimuli, what are creative ways to create a great learning environment at home?

*Try this: Walk through the home with your child and talk about spaces and have them help you design “their own” learning spaces.*

- 3. Teach fun.** They will learn online, but, it is not the same for them or their teacher. So, with all your other hats, you will embrace your role as a different kind of teacher. Challenge yourself to find innovative ways to make their learning fun and accessible. Can you take their lessons and extend learning in your home – measuring, counting, adding, translating? Remember, this is new for them, their teachers and for you. It is not like the nightly homework help – it is 24-7 for them, so try to break it up and make it real. Teach them in new ways with educational explorations on different topics from music to sports to cooking to unusual animal facts. Have them research

different countries and cultures and then take them to online museums in those places. If your children are younger, then create a “passport” and plan visits to the different countries. You can also have your older students look to take online and free classes from select Ivy League Schools – talk about a confidence boost for them and something new to discuss at the dinner table or with friends.

***Try this:** Ask your child (regardless of age) what is the one thing they studied that day and create a discussion or online exploration together. Try to tie it to something personal or your work.*

**4. Exhibit strategic patience.** The space is confined. The stress is real. And, patience is limited in many households. Add to that, your child may be experiencing boredom while confined to home. Be less quick to raise a voice or discipline, and more intentional in the opportunity to reason, teach and connect. If you are merely practicing patience, but not filling in the gap that is resulting in behaviors that are making it more difficult for everyone, this is your opportunity to practice strategic patience, which recognizes where a gap needs to be filled with more structure or a new activity, but also employs the option to just roll with it at other times and to see if your child can fill the gap on his/her own. It is a great opportunity to teach your kids that boredom is okay. Talk about it with them and help them recognize what boredom is. Introduce them to the understanding that it is fine to sit quietly with nothing to do – even in our previously overstimulated, over scheduled world we helped to create for them. It is up to the parent to be the leader and exhibit the behaviors that the children will follow. They are quick to pick up on stress and your lack of patience. Reassure them, and even surprise them, with how you respond or do not respond to them or a spouse/ significant other. Talk as a family about being mindful and practice meditation, even 5-minutes a day as a family.

***Try this:** Read one article on mindfulness and be open to attempting a 5- minute daily meditation on breath.*

**5. Expressvulnerability .** We are all feeling something. Some of us feel despair and anxiety. Others feel very differently. What we cannot do is keep any of these feelings hidden inside. Show and share your vulnerability – not in a scary way, but in an age appropriate way that encourages discussion and opens conversation. It is okay for them to know that mom or dad is having a tough day and they will work through it. Grit is important to overcoming challenge. Teach children about change and that it is healthy, even if it is difficult and different than what you typically experience together. Especially if they are old enough to have access to the computer or social media, they are understanding the world’s challenges in more unfiltered ways. Be open with them and remind them how important it is to connect with and trust family. Encourage them to use their words with you, their family and their friends. Set up “talking days” where you encourage conversations by phone or video with friends and where they stay away from social media for the day – reinforcing that other people are not having more fun than them.

***Try This:** Have a conversation with your child about your day and the different emotions you experienced and how you overcame a challenge.*

**6. Exercisetgether .** We all need recess (and free time!) Start a routine with them to exercise the mind, the spirit and the body. Give your mind a break and re energize your body. Do something physical – even if it is running in place, creating an in-home scavenger hunt, learning a new dance together, or some other form of physical activity. And, don’t forget about adding a period of creative art time in your day as well, with tactile things like paper and crayons/pens, playdough, pipe cleaners or any fun supplies you have at home. Creative expression and exploration is key to help drive away the monotony of being at home for an extended period of time. Keep the right side of your brain engaged.

***Try This:** Set a time for family recess and have your kids create the exercises and fun. Then try it together. Or, if their school gives them a physical education plan, let them teach you. You can plan breaks in your day, just as you would while at work.*

**7. Color-codeconversations** – Regardless of age, color is powerful in all facets of our lives. There is a system we have identified, Humanize MindMaps™, that color codes conversations, meetings, and interactions, even for the family. Colors are powerful in helping to acclimate the brain to what is happening or expected in that moment. Is the conversation about fun get it done? Or, navigating challenge and ambiguity? Or, is it blue sky dreaming? Whatever the conversation, there is a color to coordinate the conversation and set the tone and get the family connected to the task or conversation at hand (visit [braddeutser.com/resources](http://braddeutser.com/resources) to find Humanize MindMaps™.)

***Try This:** Each night at dinner, pick a color and have the family do the exercise together. Have fun being connected to the same color and exploring how each person experiences the color differently.*

**8. Make your own fun.** These are the moments that will last not only the night, but a lifetime. Make fun happen, even when you are distracted or struggling. No idea is too silly! This is the time to find fun in learning new things or as we say in chasing the rabbit – help your kids explore some new topic of interest, something to read or research, or some new hobby, even learning a new instrument online. Take them on a creative journey through the decades – make up stories together. Create pictures of animals and post them on the wall and have them take you on their virtual tour of the zoo. Create dress up days –host Formal Fridays (a nice shirt on top and shorts on the bottom) and themed dinners where you dress up in costumes or the kids decorate the table. Host sing song nights and even pretend you are a family band. Create a scavenger hunt tied to their learning or to explore different spaces in the home. Host play dates with their friends virtually – have them actually play. Go on walks, even if the walks are through scenic sites on the computer. Have them cook with you and experiment with food colors and other twists so they can be part of the experimentation and fun.

***Try this:** Create your dance party or make your own music video as a family.*

**9. Celebrate each day.** It is hard to celebrate in times of challenge but there are still wins in the darkest days – find something to celebrate each day. We end every family meal with each person celebrating one positive take-a-way from the meal, the day or some other time. Teach them gratitude for what they have and most important, for who they are as a person. Ask them to identify one and only one thing that you are grateful for about their family and one thing they are grateful for about themselves. Each day encourage them to pick something new. You can also find new ways to celebrate with them, including recording a celebration video of your children’s accomplishments and watching it together on the phone or computer. Find ways to celebrate them and you!

***Try this:** Start a positivity journal with each child and write down one thing that they are grateful for about each day. Get them to focus on them and their successes – regardless of their age.*

**10. Family values/priorities.** Take this time to reconnect the things that are most important to you and your family. Our societal challenges are forcing families to get back to basics and forcing connections at different levels. There are things we have done either with too much attention or not enough attention, too much reliance on technology, too little balance that we have a chance to now notice, rethink and re prioritize. Make a list of family priorities each week. Have each family member write down a “big value question” and make it part of the nightly dinner or after dinner time together. Force conversations on what is important – not things, but relationships, especially family. Take time to write down or even define the things that your family values.

***Try this:** Ask each member of the family to write down 5 things that define your family’s values. Discuss them all and narrow your list down and then celebrate them each week.*

**11. Love them.** There is nothing more important. When they act out, when they cry, when they pick a fight or retreat, when they yell or are argumentative, they are looking for love. Find extra ways to express your love – with words, with a story, with notes, with a hug, with extra reassurance. For good or bad, our children hear the news and know what is going on in the world – they need to know that they will be okay, and even if things are different, they will be okay. As my grandparents reminded us when we asked if we were rich, “we are rich with love – and it is the only kind of richness that never goes away.” Tell them. Show them. Make them know it is true.

***Try this:** Pick a moment to pull each child away separately and tell them how proud of them you are and how much you love them. Tell a story from their childhood that makes you both laugh and reconnect. Get back to the “good old days.”*

While there is no definitive guide, there is all the imagination and experimentation at your fingertips. Some days will be better and more fun and productive than others – that is life! Be real, be you and keep doing what you have always done – just be aware that the best thing you can do is simply love them. Use this time to be fully present. You’ve got this!