

Covid 19 causes stress in families. What can you as a parent do about this?

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Now is a very challenging time. It is an uncertain time that causes lots of insecurity and stress, including stress within families. Stress causes lot of tension within families.

To reduce stress and tension within a family, there are certain things we need to be aware of.

- A crisis situation causes uncertainty, and uncertainty causes stress.
- Structure promotes safety, and safety promotes peace.
- Stress in families is a vicious circle.

So, what can you do as a parent to reduce stress and tension?

Some tips:

1. Talk with your child.

A crisis situation causes uncertainty and uncertainty causes stress. Just like adults, children have lots of questions. Not only about the corona virus itself but also the measures taken to contain it cause a lot of uncertainty. Young children don't really understand what it is about. They don't have to go to school, but it's not a holiday. They have to make homework and are not allowed to see their friends. Older children or youngsters often don't understand the seriousness of the situation.

This lack of understanding can make children very angry and frustrated. Clarity is key.

- Talk with your child about the corona virus and the measures being taken. Give honest answers to questions. A lot is unknown at this moment, but also a lot not. If you don't have all answers to questions, don't worry about this. Just be honest about it with your child.
- Talk about facts and emotions. Don't avoid talking about your own emotions. Children feel immediately when something is going on or something is not right, so it's just better to talk about what you're feeling.
- Don't forget to talk about positive things. There is more solidarity; people are helping each other; and maybe you have more time for each other as a family.

- Talking with your child is not always easy. When you look on the net you will find lots of information for children about Covid 19, some good, some no. Always check where information comes from, as a lot of fake news is circulating.

2. Create a fixed structure.

Structure promotes safety, and safety promotes peace. When structure disappears, safety disappears. When safety disappears, peace disappears - and that causes stress and tension.

As a family it's very important to create a fixed structure.

A good way of doing this is to work out a daily and weekly schedule. Make a schedule in cooperation with your child. A schedule worked out with you child together has a greater chance of success

How do you do this?

- Ask everyone in the family to make a list of things they find important to do in a day or in a week. You will notice that your list might look totally different to the list of your child. Maybe as a parent you think about homework, household tasks, tidying up their room, while children might think more of screen time, television, chatting with friends.
- Come to a compromise that works for everyone. On certain topics you can give more input as a parent, such as screen time or bed time. Discuss this with your child. It's important to be aware that too much screen time and a lack of sleep can cause more stress.
- Work out a clear time schedule. You can work with hours, half hours, 15 mins...whatever is appropriate.
- Visualize your schedule; write it out; ask your child to make drawings; look up pictograms....
- Put your schedule in a visible place in your house so that both you and your children can refer to it.
- Get into action!

When your schedule doesn't work as planned. Don't panic!!!! Just have a look where things went wrong and reschedule. It can take a few changes and a bit of time before you have the feeling this is really working.

It's important that the schedule works for you and your family. Maybe your friends on Facebook or Skype are capable of doing different things than you, or they let their children play more music or make them do more homework. Good for them!! It is important that you look for a schedule that works for you!

3. Think about yourself!

Stress in families is a vicious circle. Parents' stress causes stress in children. And stress in children causes stress in parents. And more stress causes more tension, more tension causes more stress, and so on.

It's important to break this circle. Children don't have the skills to do this. It's important to do this as a parent.

To do this, there is one golden rule: think about yourself first!! Easier said than done, I hear you thinking. But it is crucial. Think of the safety instructions given on a plane. It is always clearly said first put on your own oxygen mask, and only then the oxygen mask of your child.

With stress it's the same. You need oxygen yourself, to help someone else! It is important to plan things for yourself. Do something that makes you feel relaxed: go for a run or a walk, watch your favorite movie, Netflix, a television program, read a book, chat with a friend. When you have older children, you will notice they have a lot of contact with friends. Remember, you are also allowed to contact your friends. Look what works for you, and plan it. You will notice the impact immediately.

When you can breathe, you can be there for you child!