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# TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR ELEMENTARY AGED CHILD DURING THE PANDEMIC

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**TRY TO MAINTAIN STRUCTURE AND ROUTINE.** As humans, we thrive on the predictable. All kids, particularly little ones, benefit from it. The predictable lends rhythm to our day and settles our nervous system. It sets a tone of calm during times of uncertainty and stress. You can create consistency by helping your kids wake up, get dressed, eat meals, and go to bed at the same time each day. When deciding on a daily routine, flexibility is important, as rigidity can create problems and power struggles. When you can, create your daily schedule together – kids often have great ideas about what is important. What's more, when they're part of the process, they're more likely to buy in. To guide the process, ask the questions: What would you like to do for the health of your body? The health of your brain? The health of your relationships? The health of your community? These questions set up the daily schedule as one of wellness and health, not a have-to-do list.

**CREATIVE NEW ACTIVITIES AND MAKE SURE TO MOVE/EXERCISE.** Seriously, one of the best things you can do for your child's mental health and your own is to set in motion some sort of commitment to move your body. When we build in activities to energize our body, it's a win-win for our body and our mind. Think about the things you did as a kid and try to recreate them – make fabulous forts, make our own "restaurant," make art! Think about what it was like before screens and let your kids experience science experiments, crafts, imaginary games, etc.

**MANAGE SCREEN TIME AND LIMIT THE NEWS.** This is a tough one. I'm not encouraging you to give up screens all together; just know our brains need screen breaks. It's easy for kids to fall into screens, and then have a difficult time getting out. Screens are created to keep us distracted, and they work wonderfully at doing just that. But we need to be aware of the habits we are forming. Kids who spend loads of time on screens tend to be more agitated, edgy, and wound up. Families that had strict "no video games during the week" policies may need to be more flexible to allow for that needed social connection. Just be aware of what is going on around you. It's far easier to set limits and adjust them than to have a free-for-all.

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**EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY AND ONLINE LEARNING.** Ugh, I know that technology is a tough topic, but this is the time to stay vigilant with this new learning. Honestly, we don't know what the future holds or for how long we're going to need to have flexible learning environments. What are your priorities about your child's learning? What do you want to teach them right now? Do it!

**BE HONEST BUT REASSURING ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING.** Staying informed about COVID-19 is important, but constantly talking about it or playing the news 24/7 is likely going to make your kiddos more anxious. Encourage discussion and questions about what is happening in the world, but avoid oversharing. Kids often need straightforward answers to their questions, so be brief, honest, and reassuring. Talk to them about how what they are doing is helping others in the world. Don't instill fear of getting the virus. Emphasize what we can control: we're safe and we're being "health superheroes" by doing things like washing our hands and staying away from others.

**MANAGE YOUR OWN ANXIETY and BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF AND OTHERS.** The airplane oxygen mask scenario is what I'm referring to. Taking care of your own emotions is a vital step in supporting others in your system. Overnight, many of us became homeschool teachers, short-order cooks, and house managers all while managing a job. This is HARD, but there are some things that you can do to help yourself in these changing times.

- **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS.** Feelings are never wrong, they're just feelings. Try naming your emotion, processing it (cry, rage, whatever you need), and then allowing it to move through you.
- **BE AWARE OF THE STORY YOU ARE TELLING YOURSELF ABOUT THIS TIME.** The stories we tell ourselves become powerful motivators of what we look for in our lives. If you're telling yourself every day that you're a terrible homeschool teacher, you'll find plenty of evidence to support it. Be aware of the story – what are you focusing on? This is something you can control. What you say to yourself is POWERFUL.
- **WHAT IS YOUR REFUGE?** What are you doing right now that is helping you cope with the current situation? Whether it's binge watching your favorite show or running five miles a day, make sure you are doing something to help yourself.
- **KEEP GROWING.** As hard as it might be, ask yourself, what are the areas I'm growing right now? What is growing in my children? It's never too late to strengthen your emotional skills and help your children strengthen theirs. A child's brain is still plastic, so the minute you start regulating your emotions better, their brains will change to reflect that. Being emotionally anchored will help you and your children meet whatever challenge is around the bend.