

YOUNG MiNDS

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing an orange knit sweater. She is holding a black smartphone to her ear with her right hand, which has a ring on the ring finger. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“Give yourself time, keep in contact with others and don’t watch the news too often.”

From parent to parent: a guide to getting through coronavirus for parents and carers

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the lives of many parents and carers upside down, creating added anxiety and increased pressure, especially for parents and carers of children with existing mental health problems.

We recently asked over 1,500 parents and carers what advice they would give to others caring for children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic and what is helping them cope. Below is a short summary of the key themes that came up time and again for parents and carers.

What advice would you give to other parents and carers on looking after their child?

1. Talk to your child

The top advice from parents and carers was to keep talking to your child. This included providing age-appropriate information about what is going on, reassuring them and asking how they are feeling. Many wanted to remind other parents that they don't need to have all the answers, and that they can share their own fears and worries, but to try to be calm and be there when their children need them.

“Check in regularly with your child and help them to understand what is happening and why.”

Check out our [page](#) with tips and activities you can do with your child in self-isolation and how you can use this time to start a conversation with them about their mental health.

“Be honest with them but age appropriate at all times. Tell them it's ok to feel angry, sad, tearful. Explain adults feel the same too.”

2. Listen to your child

Listening to your child came up almost as often as talking. Parents urged patience, not interrupting your child and being non-judgemental. Some said that they knew it was hard to cope with difficult emotions, but listening to your children would help them feel heard.

“Just listen and understand this is hard. Their whole world has been turned upside down - the only life they have known is different. Let them feel their own way through this just as we the parents are. So if that means no school work that afternoon and a movie so be it.”

“Let your children voice any worries they have, never make them feel they have to lock worrying away from you.”

“Talk to them but allow them to speak to you first. I found that letting my child know I was available whenever they were ready to speak was essential.”

“When they are upset, anxious or frustrated with anger or even quiet, keep checking in on them, listen & be patient, don't take anything negative said personally.”

3. Routine and structure is important but be flexible

Structure and routine was recommended but many stressed the need to be flexible. Some said that variety between the week days and the weekends had helped them. But many talked about the strangeness and uniqueness of the situation and to go with the flow rather than be strict about structure.

“Try and find new ‘anchors’. A strict routine is not especially beneficial but picking a few key things to do at the same time each day or in the same order each day helps young people to be reassured that ‘normal’ things can keep on happening.”

“Be prepared, as much as possible, for the next day’s meals and activities, so that you have a back-up plan when kids are bored or hungry.”

4. Minimise news updates

Whilst staying informed was important, most advised making sure young people and parents had breaks from the news or got information from the Government or NHS website.

“Limit access to the news and stick with things like watching Newsround daily together for specific factual advice delivered in a way that is suitable for them. Reassure them that however they are feeling is okay, no one really knows how to feel at the moment, and they can always talk to you about how they feel.”

5. Focus on their mental health and ease the pressure

A lot of parents talked about how difficult it is to balance home-schooling and wellbeing through the pandemic. Many advised giving yourself and your child a break when it gets too much, allowing them to focus on what they need now and prioritise their mental health.

“As a teacher I would say, do not put too much pressure on home-schooling your children. Just make sure they feel loved, safe and secure. Let them relax, talk to you, take time to just be rather than doing too much learning. Their young minds need to process this just like ours. Looking after their mental health takes priority over schooling at home at this present time.”

“I think to prioritise their mental health over worrying if they are ‘keeping up’ educationally. School work can be picked up on, mental health is the most important thing.”

“This is unprecedented. There should be no expectation of what to be achieving on a daily basis- let them have more time just alone. Go easy on yourself. Your anxiety will transfer to them so take care of yourself and how you are behaving.”

6. Get them to connect with others and lower your restrictions

Boundaries are important but many parents also stressed that children will need to stay connected with their friends and do things that they enjoy. Helping them stay connected with the people they trust will allow them to retain a sense of normality.

“Make sure they have time away from screens every day and move every day, but don’t stress about screen use during this time. Kids pick up on parental stress - you’re less likely to be feeling overwhelmed if you temporarily lower your parenting standards around screen time, homework, school work etc for the time being.”

“I think it’s extremely important that children are still able to connect with family and friends.”

7. Spend time together but make sure they get alone time

A lot of parents talked about how precious this time together was and that they were enjoying being able to have fun and play or do things that they wouldn’t normally have time to do. Others said that whilst time together is important, trying to be a perfect family is putting way too much pressure on everyone. Many spoke of the importance of space for children and especially teenagers, so that they can be alone and do what they want to do.

“Try not to put pressure on them to play happy families. Do some things together but factor in time for them to play alone or online with their friends. Don’t force siblings to play together, teach compromises.”

“Also give them space, everyone needs some time on their own.”

8. Exercise and get fresh air if possible

Many parents talked about the importance of exercise for their children and using the chance to get outside once a day.

“Keep home life as normal as possible; get fresh air daily and keep everyone active.”

9. Seek help if you need it

Seeking help came up a lot for parents. Some said that they felt they were in no position to offer advice and that they were really struggling. Others stressed how important it is to get help for your child if they need it, either by accessing online support, by calling your GP or contacting a Helpline.

“I would not feel equipped to give advice, the only useful thing I have said to my son, that is worthy of passing on is talk and share, and this will pass.”

Check out our [advice](#) on accessing mental health support and treatment for your child during the coronavirus pandemic.

What advice would you give to other parents or carers on looking after themselves?

65% of the parents and carers that responded to our survey said that the coronavirus pandemic has made their mental health worse.

Despite this, many parents acknowledged how hard it was to prioritise their own mental health during this time. Most suggested finding time on your own if you can and at the very least trying to be as kind to yourself as possible. Here's further advice from parents and carers.

1. Make space for yourself if you can

Taking a break and making space to do something for yourself, whether that's reading, exercising or just simply being alone, was the most common advice from parents and carers. Many stated that you can't be there for your children unless you take care of yourself and others urged other parents and carers not to feel guilty about needing a break.

"It's not selfish to have "me" time. It's a necessary thing to do. You need to be healthy to be able to help and support."

"Give yourself a break, and don't be so hard on yourself. Navigating all of this is new for everyone. Try to take 10 minutes for just you."

"It's hard for parents of SEN children to get time for themselves ordinarily let alone during the current circumstances. I find just having a shower once a day and being alone for 10 minutes helps a little!"

"Be insistent on some time each day to do what you need for you. Prioritising yourself shows your children you value yourself, and that they can value themselves."

2. Be kind to yourself

Many parents advised not putting too much pressure on yourself to be perfect. Many said not to 'beat yourself up' about things and that you can only do your best in these uncertain times. Others wanted to remind parents and carers that they are all in their own unique circumstances and that they shouldn't compare themselves to others.

"This is unprecedented. Be kind to yourself. Don't judge yourself against others."

"Be forgiving of yourself. This is new."

"Remember this is tough and it is inevitable that we'll make mistakes."

"Don't compare, do not judge yourself, you cannot be a teacher, craft-guru, master baker, therapist etc. Just do you."

3. Stay connected with the people you trust and don't be afraid to seek support

Just like children and young people, parents and carers need supportive networks also. Many advised reaching out to the people you trust and the other parents and carers that are in a similar situation. Just like young people, parents and carers should contact helplines and get support if they are struggling.

"If you ever start to feel like you're not coping find someone to talk to even if it's a stranger no matter how small you think the problem is."

"Stay in contact with friends and family and remember to talk about your concerns and ask for advice and support. It's ok to ask if you're struggling."

"Don't be afraid to admit you may need help too."

"Look up forums of parents who are also struggling, talk to friends and family, phone the Samaritans for support."

Get support: helplines and services available

Visit our [page](#) for more advice on supporting your child during the coronavirus pandemic.

Our [Parents Helpline](#) is available to offer advice to parents and carers worried about a child or young person under 25. Call for free on 0808 802 5544 from Mon - Fri, 9:30am - 4pm or use our [email service](#) at any time.

For any young person in need of urgent help, contact the free, 24/7 [YoungMinds Crisis Messenger](#) by texting YM to 85258. [The Mix](#) also provide free emotional support via phone, email or web chat. Visit their website for more information.





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