

Article

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) parenting tips

*Expert tips to help you deal with COVID-19 parenting challenges.*



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[< Back to UNICEF COVID-19 portal](#)

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## Explore the parenting tips

- [1. Talking about COVID-19](#)
- [2. One-on-one time](#)
- [3. Keeping it positive](#)
- [4. Get structured](#)
- [5. Learning through play](#)
- [6. Keeping children safe online](#)
- [7. Family harmony at home](#)
- [8. Keep calm and manage stress](#)
- [9. Bad behaviour](#)
- [10. When we get angry](#)
- [11. Family budgeting in times of financial stress](#)
- [12. Parenting in crowded homes and communities](#)
- [13. Parenting children with disabilities](#)
- [14. Parenting teens](#)
- [15. Parenting a new baby](#)

See tips in all [available languages](#).

## 1. Talking about COVID-19

Be willing to talk. They will already have heard something. Silence and secrets do not protect our children. Honesty and openness do. Think about how much they will understand. You know them best.

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COVID-19

✕

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### Be honest

Always answer their questions truthfully. Think about how old your child is and how much they can understand.

### Be supportive

Your child may be scared or confused. Give them space to share how they are feeling and let them know you are there for them.

### It is OK not to know the answers

It is fine to say “We don’t know, but we are working on it; or we don’t know, but we think.” Use this as an opportunity to learn something new with your child!

### Heroes not bullies

Explain that COVID-19 has nothing to do with the way someone looks, where they are from, or what language they speak. Tell your child that we can be compassionate to people who are sick and those who are caring for them. Look for stories of people who are working to stop the outbreak and are caring for sick people.

### There are a lot of stories going around

Some may not be true. Use trustworthy sites like [UNICEF](#) and the [World Health Organization](#).

### End on a good note

Check to see if your child is okay. Remind them that you care and that they can talk to you anytime. Then do something fun together!

[< Back to top](#)

✕

## COVID-19



## LATEST INFORMATION

Can't go to work? Schools closed? Worried about money? It is normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed.

School shutdown is also a chance to make better relationships with our children and teenagers. One-on-One time is free and fun. It makes children feel loved and secure, and shows them that they are important.

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### Set aside time to spend with each child

It can be for just 20 minutes, or longer – it's up to us. It can be at the same time each day so children or teenagers can look forward to it.

### Ask your child what they would like to do

Choosing builds their self confidence. If they want to do something that isn't OK with physical distancing, then this is a chance to talk with them about this.

### Ideas with your baby/toddler

- Copy their facial expression and sounds.
- Sing songs, make music with pots and spoons.
- Stack cups or blocks.
- Tell a story, read a book or share pictures.

### Ideas with your young child

- Read a book or look at pictures.
- Make drawings with crayons or pencils.
- Dance to music or sing songs!
- Do a chore together – make cleaning and cooking a game
- Help with school work.

### Ideas with your teenager

- Talk about something they like: sports, music, celebrities, friends.
- Cook a favorite meal together.
- Exercise together to their favorite music.

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✕

LATEST INFORMATION

### 3. Keeping it positive during the coronavirus outbreak

It's hard to feel positive when our kids or teenagers are driving us crazy. We often end up saying "Stop doing that!". But children are much more likely to do what we ask if we give them positive instructions and lots of praise for what they do right.

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#### Say the behaviour you want to see

Use positive words when telling your child what to do; like "Please put your clothes away" (instead of "Don't make a mess").

#### It's all in the delivery

Shouting at your child will just make you and them more stressed and angrier. Get your child's attention by using their name. Speak in a calm voice.

#### Praise your child when they are behaving well

Try praising your child or teenager for something they have done well. They may not show it, but you'll see them doing that good thing again. It will also reassure them that you notice and care.

#### Get real

Can your child actually do what you are asking them? It is very hard for a child to keep quiet inside for a whole day but maybe they can keep quiet for 15 minutes while you are on a call.

#### Help your teen stay connected

Teens especially need to be able to communicate with their friends. Help your teen connect through social media and other safe distancing ways. This is something you can do together, too!

[< Back to top](#)

### 4. Get structured

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COVID-19

✕

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### Create a flexible but consistent daily routine

- Make a schedule for you and your children that has time for structured activities as well as free time. This can help children feel more secure and better behaved.
- Children or teenagers can help plan the routine for the day – like making a school timetable. Children will follow this better if they help to make it.
- Include exercise in each day - this helps with stress and kids with lots of energy at home.

### Teach your child about keeping safe distances

- If it is OK in your country, get children outside.
- You can also write letters and draw pictures to share with people. Put them up outside your home for others to see!
- You can reassure your child by talking about how you are keeping safe.
- Listen to their suggestions and take them seriously.

### Make handwashing and hygiene fun

- Make a 20-second song for washing hands. Add actions!
- Give children points and praise for regular handwashing.
- Make a game to see how few times we can touch our faces with a reward for the least number of touches (you can count for each other).

### You are a model for your child's behaviour

- If you practice keeping safe distances and hygiene yourself, and treat others with compassion, especially those who are sick or vulnerable – your children and teenagers will learn from you.
- At the end of each day, take a minute to think about the day. Tell your child about one positive or fun thing they did. Praise yourself for what you did well today. You are a star!

[< Back to top](#)

## 5. Learning through play

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- There are so many different types of play that can be both fun AND educational.
- Language, numbers, objects, drama and music games give children opportunities to explore and express themselves in a safe and fun way.

### Movement games

- Create a dance choreography to your children's favourite songs. One person does a dance move and everyone else copies. Everyone takes turns being the leader.
- "Challenge" who can do the most toe touches – jumping jacks, windmill toe touches in a minute.
- "Mirror" each other – facial expressions, movements, sounds. One person can start as the leader and then switch. Try it with no leaders!
- Freeze dance: Play music or someone sings a song, and everyone dances. When the music stops, everyone must freeze. Last person still dancing becomes the judge for the next round.
- Animal dance: Same as above but when the music stops, call out a name of an animal, and everyone has to become that animal.

### Telling stories

- Tell your children a story from your own childhood.
- Ask your children to tell you a story.
- Make up a new story together starting with "Once upon a time..." Each person adds a new sentence to the story.
- Act out a favorite story or movie – older children can even direct younger ones while learning responsibility.

### Change the object

- Every day household items like brooms, mops or scarves can become fun props for games.
- Place an object in the centre of the room and whenever someone has an idea, they jump in and show the rest what the object can be.
- For example, a broom might become a horse or a microphone or even a guitar!

### Memory game

- First person says, "When COVID-19 lockdown ends, I am going to... (e.g., go to the park)".

COVID-19

✕

LATEST INFORMATION

## Singing

- Singing songs to your baby helps to develop language.
- Play or sing a song, and the first one to guess it right becomes the next leader.
- Make up a song about handwashing or physical distancing. Add dance movements!

[< Back to top](#)

## 6. Keeping children safe online during COVID-19

Children and teens are now spending a lot more time online. Being connected helps them reduce the impact of COVID-19 and encourages them to continue with their lives...but it also presents risks and dangers.

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### Online risks

- Adults targeting children for sexual purposes on social media, gaming, and messaging platforms.
- Harmful content – violence, misogyny, xenophobia, inciting suicide and self-harm, misinformation, etc.
- Teens sharing personal information and sexual photos or videos of themselves.
- Cyberbullying from peers and strangers.

### Tech fixes to protect your children online

- Set up parental controls.
- Turn on SafeSearch on your browser.
- Set up strict privacy settings on online apps and games.
- Cover webcams when not in use.

### Create healthy and safe online habits

- Involve your child or teen in creating family tech agreements about healthy device use.
- Create device-free spaces and times in your house (eating, sleeping, and playing, schoolwork).
- Help your children learn how to keep personal information private, especially from strangers – some people

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✕

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- Talk to your teen on how to report inappropriate content (see below).
- [Common Sense Media](#) has great advice for apps, games and entertainment for different ages.

### Keep your children safe with open communication

- Tell your children that if they experience something online that makes them feel upset, uncomfortable, or scared, they can talk to you and you will not get mad or punish them.
- Be alert to signs of distress. Notice if your child is being withdrawn, upset, secretive, or obsessed with online activities.
- Create trusting relationships and open communication through positive support and encouragement.
- Note that every child is unique and may use different ways to communicate. Take time to adjust your message for your child's needs. For example, children with learning disabilities, may require information in simple format.

[< Back to top](#)

## 7. Family harmony at home

When we model peaceful and loving relationships, our children feel more secure and loved. Positive language, active listening and empathy help maintain a peaceful and happy family environment during these stressful times.

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### We are models for our kids

- How we talk and behave in front of others is a big influence on how they behave too!
- Try to talk kindly to everyone in the family, adults and children.
- Bad communication between adults in the household can have a negative impact on our children.
- The more we practice modelling peaceful, loving relationships for our children the more secure and loved they will feel.

### Use positive language. It works!

- Tell others what you want them to do instead of what you don't want them to do: Instead of "Stop shouting."

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COVID-19

✕

**LATEST INFORMATION**

- Let each family member take turns to choose a whole-family activity each day.
- Find ways to spend quality time with your partner and other adults in your home, too!

**Be an empathetic active listener**

- Listen to others when they are talking with you.
- Be open and show them that you hear what they are saying.
- It can help to even summarize what you have heard before responding: "What I hear you saying is..."

**Share the load**

- Looking after children and other family members is difficult, but it's much easier when responsibilities are shared.
- Try to share household chores, childcare, and other tasks equally among family members.
- Create a schedule for time "on" and time "off" with other adults in your household.
- It is okay to ask for help when you are feeling tired or stressed, so that you can take a break.

**Feeling stressed or angry?**

- Give yourself a 10-second pause. Breathe in and out slowly five times. Then try to respond in a calmer way. Millions of parents say this helps - A LOT!
- Call a truce when you can see arguments building up, and go into another room or outside if you can.

See more information on "[when we get angry](#)" and "[keep calm and manage stress](#)".

[< Back to top](#)

## 8. Keep calm and manage stress from COVID-19

This is a stressful time. Take care of yourself, so you can support your children.

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✕

COVID-19

✕

**LATEST INFORMATION**

We all need a break sometimes. When your children are asleep, do something fun or relaxing for yourself. Make a list of healthy activities that YOU like to do. You deserve it!

### Listen to your kids

Be open and listen to your children. Your children will look to you for support and reassurance. Listen to your children when they share how they are feeling. Accept how they feel and give them comfort.

### Take a pause

Here's a one-minute relaxation activity that you can do whenever you are feeling stressed or worried.

#### Step 1: Set up

- Find a comfortable sitting position, your feet flat on the floor, your hands resting in your lap.
- Close your eyes if you feel comfortable.

#### Step 2: Think, feel, body

- Ask yourself, "What am I thinking now?"
- Notice your thoughts. Notice if they are negative or positive.
- Notice how you feel emotionally. Notice if your feelings are happy or not.
- Notice how your body feels. Notice anything that hurts or is tense.

#### Step 3: Focus on your breath

- Listen to your breath as it goes in and out.
- You can put a hand on your stomach and feel it rise and fall with each breath.
- You may want to say to yourself "It's okay. Whatever it is, I am okay."
- Then just listen to your breath for a while.

#### Step 4: Coming back

- Notice how your whole body feels.
- Listen to the sounds in the room.

#### Step 5: Reflecting

- Think 'do I feel different at all?'
- When you are ready, open your eyes. Be open and listen to your children. Your children will look to you for

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✕

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## 9. Bad behaviour

All children misbehave. It is normal when children are tired, hungry, afraid, or learning independence. And they can drive us crazy when stuck at home.

Download [these tips](#) [PDF format].

### Redirect

- Catch bad behavior early and redirect your kids' attention from a bad to a good behavior.
- Stop it before it starts! When they start to get restless, you can distract with something interesting or fun: "Come, let's play a game together!"

### Take a pause

Feel like screaming? Give yourself a 10-second pause. Breathe in and out slowly five times. Then try to respond in a calmer way. Millions of parents say this helps - A LOT!

### Use consequences

Consequences help teach our children responsibility for what they do. They also allow discipline that is controlled. This is more effective than hitting or shouting.

- Give your child a choice to follow your instruction before giving them the consequence.
- Try to stay calm when giving the consequence.
- Make sure you can follow through with the consequence. For example, taking away a teenager's phone for a week is hard to enforce. Taking it away for one hour is more realistic.
- Once the consequence is over, give your child a chance to do something good, and praise them for it.

One-on-One time, praise for being good, and consistent routines will reduce bad behaviour.

Give your children and teens simple jobs with responsibilities. Just make sure it is something they are able to do. And praise them when they do it!

[< Back to top](#)

✕

COVID-19

✕

**LATEST INFORMATION**

We love our children and teenagers, but the stresses of COVID-19, money and lockdown can make us angry. Here is how we can maintain control and manage our anger so we do not hurt others.

Brain science shows if you control your anger or do something positive you increase your child's brain development. That's real success!

Download [these tips](#) [PDF format].

### Stop the river at the source

- The same things usually make us get stressed and angry every time.
- What makes you angry? When does it happen? How do you normally react?
- Prevent it from starting. If it happens when you are tired, get some sleep or rest. If it's hunger, try to be sure you can eat. If it's feeling alone, ask someone for support.
- Look after yourself. Check the "[take a pause](#)" and "[managing stress](#)" tips for ideas.

### Take a break

- When you start feeling angry, take a 20-second cool down. Breathe in and out slowly 5 times before you speak or move.
- Go somewhere else for 10 minutes to regain control of your emotions. If you have safe outdoor space, go outside.
- If it's a baby that won't stop crying, it's OK to leave them safely on their back and walk away for a bit. Call someone to calm you down. Check on them every 5-10 minutes.

### Take care of yourself

- We all need to connect. Talk to friends, family, and other support networks every day.
- Cut back on drinking or don't drink, especially when the kids are awake.
- Do you have weapons or things that can be used to hit others? Lock them up, hide them or take them out of the home.
- If it's not safe for them at home it is OK for children to go out to get help or stay somewhere else for a while.

The COVID-19 crisis isn't forever - we just have to get through it now...one day at a time.

[< Back to top](#)

✕

## COVID-19



## LATEST INFORMATION

Millions are stressed about money because of COVID-19. It can make us feel exhausted, angry, and distracted. Children or teenagers asking for things can cause arguments. But we can do things that help cope with financial stress.

Download [these tips](#) [PDF format].

### Involve children and teens in making a family budget

- A budget is how we decide what we will spend our money on, even in stressful times.
- Making a budget together helps children understand that we all need to make hard decisions in difficult times.
- It also helps families to have enough at the end of the month and borrow less.

### What do we spend now?

- Get a piece of paper (or old newspaper or a cardboard box) and a pen.
- Draw pictures of all the things that you and your family spend money on each month.
- Write next to each picture how much each thing costs.
- Add up how much money you have each month to spend.

### Talk about needs and wants

- Needs: Which things are important or must have for your family to survive? (like food, soap to wash hands, needs for family members with an illness or disability)
- Wants: Which things are nice to have but not essential?
- Discuss with your children what things you could try to spend less on.

### Build your own budget

- Find a bag of stones or anything with lots of pieces. This is your money for the month.
- As a family, decide what you will spend on what, and put the stones on your picture.
- If you can save even a tiny amount for the future, or for another emergency – it is great!

### Find out if there is help you can get

- Your government may be giving money, or food parcels to families during COVID-19.



## COVID-19



## LATEST INFORMATION

Keeping your family healthy and safe from COVID-19 can feel even harder when you live in crowded conditions. But there are things you can do to make this easier for your family.

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### Stay where you are

- Limit those leaving and returning to your immediate living space to as few and as infrequent as possible.
- Only leave your household or area for essential reasons like getting food or medical attention.

### Help your children with physical distancing

- Explain to your children that they have an important job of keeping themselves and their community healthy by temporarily physically distancing from others
- Show them extra positive attention when they make an effort to practice safe physical distancing from others.

### Make handwashing and hygiene fun!

- It might be hard to find soap and water, but practicing good hygiene is more important now than ever.
- Try to wash all family members' hands as often as possible.
- Let children teach each other how to wash their hands.
- Encourage children to avoid touching their face.

### Share the load

- Looking after children and other family members is difficult in cramped spaces, but it's much easier when responsibilities are shared.
- Try to share household chores, childcare, and other tasks equally among family members.
- Create a schedule for time "on" and time "off" with other adults in your household.
- It is okay to ask for help when you are feeling tired or stressed, so that you can take a break.

### Exercise daily

- Encourage children to think of activities they can do to exercise while avoiding contact with people who do not live already in your immediate space.

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COVID-19

✕

**LATEST INFORMATION**

difference! Millions of families find that this helps.

Keeping positive, having a routine and trying to find some one-to-one time with each child when you can will help you manage your child behaviours and your feelings.

[< Back to top](#)

### 13. Parenting children with disabilities

All children, including those with disabilities, need love, respect, nurturing, and time, especially during difficult and uncertain times.

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#### Keep your child safe

- It is strongly recommended that you follow local guidelines for COVID-19 while helping your child stay as active as possible both indoors and outdoors.
- Ask your local support team or intervention centres about special arrangements for the COVID-19.
- Keep emergency contact numbers where you can easily see it, such as on the refrigerator.

#### Ask for help if you can

- Share the load with other adult family members.
- You are not alone! Keep connected with people who understand your situation. Share your challenges AND your successes.
- It is normal to feel stressed, frustrated and afraid at this time.
- Be kind to yourself and take a break when you need to! See "[When We Get Angry](#)" and "[Keep Calm and Manage Stress](#)" for more advice.

#### Be supportive, empathetic and loving

- Your child may not have the same support they usually have and this can lead to additional challenges, such as increased stress, anxiety and frustration.

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## COVID-19



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- Get down to your child's level when communicating with your child.
- Maintain eye contact and a positive attitude.
- Take your time to allow your child the space to communicate.
- Observe, listen to and confirm that you understand your child.

## Reinforce the positive!

- Reinforce strengths with praise and stimulate their abilities rather than highlight the things they cannot do.
- Only help children when they need it. Too much support denies them the chance to become independent and can feel patronizing.

## Strengthen routines

- Routines help children feel secure and safe. See "[Get structured](#)" for more information.
- Create a daily routine with activities that are familiar to your child and include some of their favourite activities.
- Help your child connect to friends and family members via phone chats, writing cards or drawing pictures.
- Provide your child with choices so that they have a sense of control. This also increases self-esteem.
- Use simple language and clear instructions and nonverbal communication for children who need it (for example: gestures, pictures, and visual aids).

[< Back to top](#)

## 14. Parenting teens

Adolescents may be missing school, friends and their social life. It is important to provide them with extra support as well as the space to express themselves independently.

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### Spend time with your teen

- Plan creative ways to communicate with friends and family (e.g. writing messages or drawing pictures).

• [Cook a favourite meal together](#)

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## COVID-19



## LATEST INFORMATION

- Involve them in fact-finding and listen to their questions.
- Task them with exploring a topic and reporting back to the family from a radio programme, a newspaper article or the internet.

## Sharing responsibilities

- Teens appreciate having extra responsibilities. Allow them to choose a special job that helps out.
- Create a time during the day where everyone shares one thing that they enjoyed.
- Share responsibilities equally amongst women/men and girls/boys.

## Making routines

- Involve your teen in creating daily schedules.
- Set goals and rewards together.
- Make sure your teen has time to relax along with structured time for chores and schoolwork.

## Dealing with difficult behaviour

- Talk through the effects of challenging behaviour.
- Explore alternatives with your teen and let them make suggestions.
- Decide together on clear and fair rules and boundaries.
- Praise your teen when they behave well and follow guidelines.

## Promote kindness and compassion

- Model kindness and compassion for those who are sick and those who are caring for the sick.
- Share how your teen can make a difference like standing up for someone facing discrimination or helping a neighbor with food deliveries if they live alone.

## Help your teen manage stress

- Teens will get stressed too - sometimes from different things than you.
- Allow them to express how they feel and accept their feelings.
- Try to listen to your teen and see things from their perspective.
- Do relaxing and fun activities together.

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COVID-19

✕

LATEST INFORMATION

- Remind your teen that they can talk to you whenever they experience something upsetting online.

[< Back to top](#)

## 15. Parenting a new baby

We spend a lot of time indoors with a young baby and COVID-19 makes it much more intense. It is completely normal to feel isolated, overwhelmed, anxious, and scared for you and your baby.

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### Sharing is caring

- Use social media, phone calls and anything at your disposal to reach out and connect with others.
- Take turns with others to care for your baby. Take time for YOU.
- Sleep when your baby sleeps so you have energy.

### Communicating with your baby

- Follow your baby's lead by copying or mirroring.
- Repeat and react to their babble or words.
- Use your child's name when you speak to your baby.
- Use words to describe what your baby is doing.

### Learning with your baby

- Make their environment interesting!
- Babies respond to stimulation.
- Let your baby explore the world through the 5 senses!

### Babies learn through play!

- Get to your baby's level and make sure they can see and hear you.
- Play peek-a-boo, sing songs or lullabies, stack blocks or cups.

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COVID-19

**LATEST INFORMATION**

- Respond to your baby immediately.
- Check to see what is making your baby cry.
- Swaddling or gently rocking can help calm your baby.
- Singing a lullaby or playing soft music can be soothing.
- Keep calm and take a break! You can place your baby in a safe place on their back and then walk away. Be sure to check on your baby every 5 to 10 minutes.
- If you think your baby is injured or ill, call a health service provider or visit a clinic.

Be gentle with your children as they learn, but also with yourself as the parent!

- Just because something didn't go well today or you lost your temper, this doesn't define who you are as a parent. Remind yourself of the things you did well today, even if they may seem small.

[< Back to top](#)

These [parenting tips](#) are made available as part of the [Parenting for Lifelong Health](#) initiative.

[< Back to UNICEF COVID-19 portal](#)

[< Back to UNICEF Parenting COVID-19 guide for parents](#)

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COVID-19



LATEST INFORMATION



Page

## Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) information centre

The latest COVID-19 news and resources, as well as tips to protect you and your family

[> Visit the page](#)

Page

## Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): What parents should know

How to protect yourself and your children

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## 6 ways parents can support kids through the coronavirus

A psychologist's advice on how to help your children deal with the many emotions they may be experiencing now

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COVID-19



LATEST INFORMATION



Page

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