

# Parenting in the Time of Covid19

Assembled by SSIO-USA Mental Health Professionals for SSIO members

Our world is facing an incredibly challenging time as we forge our way through a Pandemic-dominated era. So many changes are occurring such as folks furloughed from jobs, families quarantined at home together, worries about daily supply planning, healthcare of loved ones, online and home-schooling, and the list goes on. It is more important now than ever that parents take the time to understand their children, the deep concerns they may have, the disruption to their schedule, and their restlessness. As a parent, you may have your own fears and tensions at this time. You may be dealing with financial stress or overwhelmed by the increased duties at work and at home. Given these issues, it will be more important now than ever to take responsibility for your own actions and attitudes.

***“Whatever parents tell their children to follow, they should themselves adhere to it. Then only will their children become good. Due to the effect of modern times, some children try to keep distance from their parents, thereby causing them to develop tension and bad temper.” – Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 1, 2008***

It is of utmost importance for parents to self-reflect on their own emotions at this time. As parents, you are faced with a variety of stressors right now and it would be beneficial for you to think about what these are and how they are impacting your own mood as well as your children. If you are an anxious parent, who grows irritable during periods of stress, your child will pick up on this and may internalize this emotion or hold back their own emotions due to burdening you further. Some tips for your own self-care:

- **Beginning an awareness practice:** Engage in breathwork, meditation, or yoga. This will be your time for a few moments to ground yourself and to help bring your mind back online to the present moment.
- **Journaling:** Use journaling as a way to write down your thoughts, triggers of stress, fears, and frustrations ensure that you are aware of your own moods as well as to note down all the positive aspects of your life, such as people or things you are grateful for. Dr. Martin Seligman’s research on positive psychology and gratitude have shown there is a significant association between positive thinking and an individual’s well-being.
- **Tag Team:** Take turns working and playing with your children on different tasks. If you have a spouse or another family member who can help you, this can be a welcome reprieve for your child as well as yourself, especially when it comes to online schooling. For instance, your child may resist having the same parent working with them on school or may view one parent only as the disciplinarian and the other as the permissive parent. If you are a single parent, with no supports, it will be helpful for you and your child to take breaks, engage in some meaningful solitary moments to refresh, and come back together. The schools may also have suggestions on tutors and teachers online who can provide some extra help with your child on schoolwork.
- **Take Breaks:** Finally, given the circumstances, it is alright to take a break once in a while from activities for yourself and your child. This models to your child how to take appropriate time-outs and come back to a situation with new energy.

***“First understand, then adjust” – Sathya Sai Baba***

Just as you are checking in with yourself, your young child, may be struggling with this new normal of having school online, not having live playdates, and being home all the time. Swami talks of the importance of extending empathy and understanding to others. This includes your family members and especially your children. At this time, kids and teens are going through so many changes and have been adjusting to doing school from home. It is important that you understand first and empathize, and then find ways to help you and your child adjust. Here are a few tips that might help:

- **Communicate:** Talk about what is happening with your children. Your avoidance of this issue may only lead to more fear, confusion, discomfort in expressing worries. Validate your child’s feelings. Use RAIN\* (Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture) with older teens. Do a weekly check-in to see how your child is doing, model this yourself among the adults in the home.
- **Observe:** Watch for signs and symptoms of depression or anxiety. These include appetite changes, tantrums, or more acting out behaviors, moodiness, sleep issues. Some children may regress in their behaviors (i.e. wanting to sleep with parents, sleep less, throwing tantrums, school refusal etc). If this happens, it is time to take a break and help your child feel heard. Please reach out for professional help if this is significantly impacting your child’s daily activities.
- **Positive Family Time:** Focus on positive time with your child/teen. This can be at mealtimes, in-between activities, or while doing something mundane together (i.e. cleaning, walking, etc). Make these moments positive by stating good things you have noticed that they have done. Praise your child for trying something new or for following directions.
- **Creativity:** Use boredom to help your child try something new. Boredom is a time for you and/or your child to get creative. With little ones, anything tactile or hands-on such as arts and crafts that will help engage their senses in a positive direction. For older children, encourage them to use art, music, drama, film, or writing to compose or create something they can share.
- **Technology:** Try to balance Social Media/Online activities with breaks and outdoor time. Engage with your child with their online games - the “new virtual playground”. The online virtual playground is now part of your child’s development, so it will be beneficial to understand this world and how you can best support your child to navigate the many choices they have on these platforms.
- **Structure:** Use structure and a schedule for yourself and for your children. Children need routine and benefit when they are provided with this. This will also help you both be more productive in a day when you feel less motivated.

Reference:

Seligman, Martin E. P. & Steen, Tracy A. (2005); Seligman Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions. University of Pennsylvania Nansook Park University of Rhode Island & Christopher Peterson University of Michigan (final revision, April 22, 2005)