

Parenting in times of stress



Family harmony at home

Children should always feel safe and secure, especially at home. Here's how positive language and active listening can help maintain a peaceful and happy environment.

Be a role model

The way we behave in front of our children has a huge influence on their own behaviour—so set a great example by:

- Talking kindly to everyone—from friends and family members to the people you meet in your day-to-day life
- Communicating positively with the other adult members of your household
- Demonstrating the importance of maintaining loving, caring relationships

Share the load

- Looking after children and other family members is difficult, but it's much easier when responsibilities are shared
- Try to divide household tasks, childcare and other responsibilities equally among family members so that you are not overwhelmed
- Create a schedule for time 'on' and time 'off' with the other adults in your household, so everyone has a chance to take a break
- Remember that it's okay to ask for help, especially if you are feeling tired or stressed

Manage negative feelings

- If you feel yourself getting stressed or angry, take a 10-second pause and slowly breathe in and out five times. This should help you to respond in a calmer way

- If you sense an argument is starting, then it's time for a short break. Go into another room or, if you can, step outside and wait until you feel the moment has passed.
- Take a look at our tip sheets on [Looking after yourself](#) and [Anger management advice](#)

Use positive language

- Ask people to do what you would like them to do—'Please speak more quietly'—instead of telling them what you don't want them to do—'Stop shouting!'
- Praising people makes them feel appreciated, so don't forget to say thank you to those who help you and encourage your child or teen to do the same

Harmony-promoting activities

- Let each person in your household take turns to choose an activity that you can all do together
- Find ways to spend quality time alone with your partner or the other adults in your household

Be an active listener

- Listen carefully when people are talking to you
- Show that you hear what they are saying by nodding your head and asking questions
- It can help to summarise what someone has said before responding, to check you have understood correctly

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Learning through play

Children can learn a lot about the world around them while playing. We take a look at some fun activities and games that can educate while they entertain.

● The power of play

- There are lots of games and activities that can teach children valuable lessons while also being lots of fun
- Words, numbers and pictures allow children to express themselves, while acting and musical activities offer an opportunity to get even more creative

● Get moving

- Make up a dance to your child's favourite song. Each person gets the chance to make up a move that everyone copies
- Set an exercise challenge. Find out who can do the most toe touches, jumping jacks or laps around the room in one minute
- Pretend to be a mirror as you copy each other's facial expressions, actions and sounds
- Play music or sing a song and encourage everyone to dance. When the music stops, everyone must freeze. The last person still moving becomes the judge for the next round
- Give the freeze game an animal twist. When the music stops, call out the name of an animal and see who can do the best impression

● Tell stories

- Tell your child a story about something that happened to you when you were young, and ask your child to tell you a story in return
- Make up a new story together with each person taking it in turns to add a sentence to the story
- Act out the plot from your favourite fairy tale or film. Older children can even try directing younger children, while learning responsibility

● Transform everyday objects

- Teach children to embrace their imaginations by using household items — like saucepans, cushions or empty packaging — as fun props in games
- Place an object in the middle of the room and form a circle around it. When someone has an idea, they jump in and show the rest what the object can be used for. A broom or mop might become a horse, or a hairbrush could be used as a microphone or even a guitar!

● Test your memory

- Kickstart a fun memory exercise by starting a list of items. For example
 - when I went shopping, I bought...
 - when I went to the zoo, I saw...
 - when I was in the kitchen, I ate...
- Each person has to remember and recite what's on the list, before adding their own item
- You can add an extra educational challenge by making the list alphabetical

● Sing a song

- Singing songs to your baby or young child can help them develop language skills from a very early age
- When your child is a little older you can play musical games, such as asking them to guess the song that you are singing or playing
- Anything can be turned into an instrument. Think about what household items can be used to make a sound, and try to compose a song together

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Anger management advice

Anger is a natural human response, especially when faced with a stressful situation. However, it's important to maintain control whenever possible. By finding positive ways to cope with negative emotions, you can ensure your child feels loved and supported at all times.



Recognise your triggers

- Think about what causes you to get angry. Is it triggered by a particular experience or situation? When you understand why you get angry or stressed, you can find ways to avoid it happening
- For example, if you get angry when you are tired or hungry, try to get enough sleep each night and eat regular meals
- Think about how you react when you are angry, and what you could do differently in order to calmly respond to difficult situations
- Read our **Looking after yourself** tip sheet to find ways to support your mental wellbeing

Positive feedback is so important

Praise your child's efforts and your own efforts to manage your anger, no matter how small. This will help you feel more in control and help build your child's confidence in their ability to manage their anger.

Know when you need a break

- When you feel yourself getting stressed or angry, take a 10-second pause and slowly breathe in and out five times. This should help you to respond in a calmer way
- If you can, put some distance between yourself and the situation that's making you angry. Step into another room or go outside for 10 minutes to give yourself a chance to regain control of your emotions
- If you are getting angry because your baby won't stop crying, it's okay to leave them on their back in a safe place, like their crib, and take a short break. Go back to check on them every 5-10 minutes

Take care of yourself

- Managing anger in a positive way sets a good example for children and helps them feel safe and secure, so develop some coping strategies that can help you maintain control
- Talk to friends, family members and anyone else who can offer support — it's important to feel connected and encouraged
- Reflect on something that made you feel angry and try to learn from the experience. This should help you handle a similar situation should it happen again

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Create a happy environment in a small space

Stuck indoors because of wet weather? Children getting bored of sharing a bedroom? Sometimes, we would all like a little more space, but there are things you can do to ensure everyone gets along — even in crowded or cramped conditions.

Rainy day activities

- Being stuck at home can still be entertaining. Create an obstacle course using household objects or set an indoor exercise challenge to find out who can do the most toe touches, jumping jacks or laps around the room in one minute
- Find fun ways to spend your time together — that could be a story-telling evening or a cookery session. Make sure everyone has a chance to get involved, and take it in turns to choose an activity.

Clear away clutter

- Create more space by tidying up together. Rather than being a chore, it's an opportunity to discover old toys, games and clothes
- Tidy away the items you want to keep and make a pile of items that can be donated to charity or given to friends or family members

Share the load

- Looking after children and other family members is difficult, but it's much easier when responsibilities are shared

- Try to divide household tasks, childcare and other responsibilities equally among other family members so that you are not overwhelmed
- Create a schedule for time 'on' and time 'off' with other adults in your household, so everyone has a chance to take a break
- Remember that it's okay to ask for help, especially if you are feeling tired or stressed

Take a pause

- If you feel yourself getting annoyed, take a 10-second pause
- Focus on slowing breathing in and out
- This will help you respond in a calmer way

Stay positive

By coming up with a routine and enjoying some quality time with your child or teen, you can create a happy environment — wherever you are.

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Caring for a child with disabilities

Caring for a disabled child can make your daily parenting duties more challenging, especially during difficult or uncertain times. We take a look at what you can do to ensure your child always feels loved and looked after.

Spend quality time together

- Read to your child, tell them a story or make musical sounds using household objects. Even if verbal communication is a challenge, your child can still tell you when they are enjoying something by laughing and smiling
- Stimulate your child's senses through play. Introduce colours, different materials and noises (such as scrunched up paper or a stone dropping into water). All this will help them engage with their environment
- Even when you are busy, you can still spend time together. Describe to your child exactly what you are doing — from sweeping the floor to washing up dishes — it's all stimulation for them

Communicate clearly

- Some physical conditions and learning disabilities might mean your child has little or no clear speech, or their speech is slow to develop. When talking to your child, it helps to:
 - Get down to your child's level so they can see and hear you
 - Maintain eye contact, smile and be encouraging
 - Be patient and give your child time to respond
 - Listen, nod your head and make it clear that you hear your child

Build an emotional connection

- Use physical and verbal support to make sure your child feels loved and accepted
- Remember that positive body language, facial expressions, gestures, sounds and words can make a big difference

Support their independence

- Build your child's confidence by praising the things they are able to, rather than focusing on the things they aren't able to do
- Only come to your child's assistance when they need it, otherwise they might feel patronised and unable to test out their abilities

Ask for help

- You are not alone and it's normal to feel stressed, anxious or frustrated when caring for any child, especially during uncertain times
- Share the responsibility of caring for your child with other adult family members
- Connect with people who understand your situation, and share both your challenges and your successes
- Be kind to yourself and take a break when you need to. Our tips sheets on Looking after yourself and Anger management advice can help

Follow a routine

- Having a set schedule can help you feel more organised and in control — see our Create a routine tip sheet for advice
- Your routine should include daily tasks as well as your child's favourite activities. This way you can have fun together while still being productive
- Factor in free time where you give your child a choice of activities as this will help to boost their confidence
- Use simple language to give clear instructions and use non-verbal communication (gestures, pictures, sounds) to help your child understand what's planned for each day

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Supporting your teens

They've grown up so quickly, but your children still need to feel loved and supported. Here's how to enjoy quality time with your teen, teach good habits and keep them safe and happy as they make their journey towards adulthood.



Activities to enjoy together

- Create a fun photo or video to send to friends or family members
- Choose a recipe and spend some time cooking or baking together in the kitchen
- Do some exercise together. You could go for a jog or play a game of catch
- Sport, music, films — talk to them about things that really interest them

Show you trust them

- Teens appreciate having extra responsibilities. Allow them to take on an important job to show that you trust them and value their help
- Give everyone an opportunity to get involved with day-to-day household tasks. It will give teens a chance to learn new skills and feel that they are making a worthwhile contribution

Help them achieve their goals

- What does your teen want to do? Whether it's a short-term or a long-term goal, draw up a schedule together to help them get there
- Reward every step that gets them closer to achieving their goal
- Factor in time to relax and have fun, as well as time to get important tasks — like homework and household chores — done

Always offer support

- Recognise that difficult behaviour might be a sign that something is wrong, so ask how they are and try to understand their actions

- Explore ways of coping with situations that might be making them feel unhappy or stressed
- Set clear expectations for their behaviour and come up with a set of rules and boundaries that you both think is fair
- Praise your teen when they are well behaved and recognise when they do something positive

Promote kindness and compassion

- Set an example by showing empathy and encourage your teen to consider how friends, family members — even strangers — might be impacted by difficult situations
- Explain how your teen can make a difference by standing up for someone who is being bullied

Help them manage stress

- Ask them how they are feeling and listen to their answer
- Try to see things from their perspective in order to understand how they are feeling
- Help them relax by coming up with ways to cope with stress — such as breathing exercises
- Suggest you do an activity together that will help them to relax and unwind

Keep them safe online

- Involve your teen in creating family tech agreements about healthy device use
- Explain how important it is to keep personal information private, especially from strangers
- Remind your teen that they can talk to you if they've seen something or experienced something upsetting while online

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Welcoming a new baby

Becoming a parent, or welcoming a new addition to your existing family, is an exciting time. But it can also signal a huge change that many people find overwhelming and stressful. Here's how to give your baby — and you — the best possible start.

Sharing is caring

- Use social media or pick up the phone to connect with people who can offer support
- Accept help and take turns to care for your baby, so that you can have some time to yourself
- Sleep when your baby sleeps so that you have extra energy when they wake up

Entertain your baby

- Get on your baby's level so they can see and hear you
- Sing songs and play music with pots and spoons
- Stack colourful cups or building blocks
- Tell them a story and show them a picture book

Communicate clearly

- Copy the expressions and sounds they make, and react to their babble or words
- Use your baby's name when you speak to them
- Describe what your baby is doing

Learning together

- Make their environment interesting — colourful decorations and different textures will stimulate their senses

- Allow your baby to explore their world through their five senses — sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch

Soothing a crying baby

- Crying is your baby's way of saying that they need comfort and care
- Try to find out what's causing your baby to cry. It might be because they are hungry, tired, too hot or too cold, or their nappy needs to be changed
- Singing a lullaby or playing some gentle music in the background might help distract your baby. A rattle or a mobile hanging above their cot can give them something to look at
- Gently rocking or rhythmically stroking your baby's back can help them to feel calm
- If you are worried, speak to your midwife or a healthcare professional

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

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

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Parenting during Covid-19

Navigating the global pandemic brings its own set of unique challenges to parenting, and it's completely normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed during this uncertain time. Here are 6 tips to make things easier for you and your children.

● Spend quality time together

Spending quality time together presents an incredible opportunity to make your children feel loved and secure. Just 5 minutes every day can make a big difference.

● Praise good behaviour

When your child or teen follows your instructions, or are behaving well, tell them. Showing that you notice will reassure them and demonstrate that you care.

● Give clear instructions

Instead of telling your children not to make a mess, use positive language and give them a practical task—such as tidying the kitchen or putting away the washing.

● Create a daily routine

Having a daily routine and sticking to it as much as possible gives children and teens a valuable sense of security. Factor in meals, activities and free time to give you flexibility.

● Manage bad behaviour

Catch difficult or negative behaviour as soon as it starts and encourage a more positive approach by suggesting a fun game or interesting activity to keep your children entertained.

● Look after yourself

Remember you are not alone, so seek support. If you feel yourself getting annoyed, take a 10-second pause and focus on slowing breathing in and out. This will help you respond in a calmer way.

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