



## Guided Notes for

### Supporting Educator Wellbeing: Wellness Tips to Help You S.O.A.R.

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*Guided Notes* are designed for you to follow along and actively participate with the PowerPoint slides and webinar. You can make notes, write questions, expand your thinking on a topic, or doodle. These notes correspond directly to the content presented in the PowerPoint Slides.

### Thank you Sponsors!



### WellEducator Core Assumptions

- **All educators** are doing the best they can and there’s always room for growth and development.
- Nurturing others begins by nurturing oneself.
- Educators who model empathetic, compassionate, and nurturing behaviors can help students embrace these skills for themselves.
- Educator wellbeing is enhanced most effectively through professional development with skills training, coaching and consultation firmly grounded in a scientific evidence base.

### During our Time Together (Learning Objectives)

- Learn and practice 3 mindfulness exercises
- Identify infinite possibilities for wellness & potential barriers
- Identify supports to get “unstuck” and create lasting change

Can you complete this sentence for yourself?

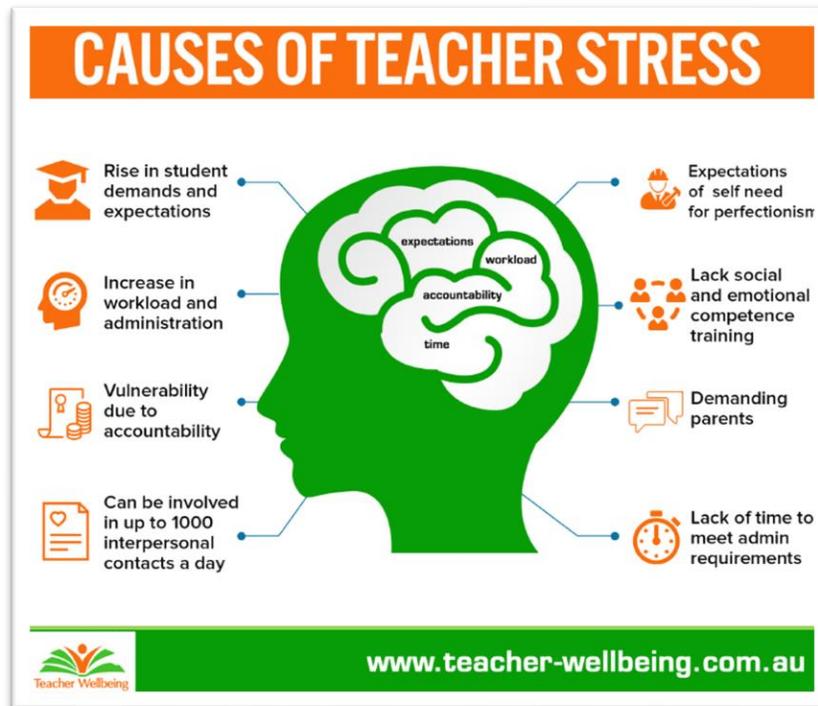
*Right now, I will put aside my thoughts of... by... so, I can...*

### Wellbeing

“A state in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community”

World Health Organization, 2004

## “Typical Stressors”



Thank you, Daniela Falecki @ [www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au](http://www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au) for use of your infographic!

### COVID-19 Changes & Challenges

- How we teach,
- How we plan,
- How we connect with students, families, colleagues and administration,
- How we monitor attendance and
- How we measure learning
- ...

*What additional stressors are you currently experiencing? What impact are they having on you?*

*What are you currently doing to take care of yourself?*

### **Just this moment, just this task...Breathing Meditation**

*Breathe in - what you desire most for yourself right here, right now*

*Breathe out what no longer serves you – what is not working for you*

## Today's focus: Individual Resilience

A message from WellEducator: Educators, You've Got This!  
**Resilience**

“Determination, self-worth, and kindness are what make us **resilient**: able to cope with adversity and push through challenges in the pursuit of opportunities. While **resilience** helps us recover from loss and trauma, it offers much more than that. **True resilience** fosters well-being, an underlying sense of happiness, love, and peace.” From: Hanson, R. (2018). *Resilient: How to grow an unshakeable core of calm, strength* p. 2.



### Wellness Tips to Help You S.O.A.R.

(Connect to your) **S**enses

**O**pen to possibilities

**A**rrange your environment

**R**einforce

(Connect to your) **S**enses

Mindfulness is

“An awareness of our inner and outer experience with an attitude of curiosity and care in order to develop wisdom and understanding.” (Mark Coleman, 2019)

Happify Mindfulness As a Superpower Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>

Notes:

(Connect to your) **S**enses

**Become an Observer** (Linehan, 2015)

- “Noticing body sensations coming through your senses
- Paying attention on purpose, to the present moment
- Control your attention, but not what you see.
- Push away nothing. Cling to nothing.
- Practice wordless watching.
- Observe both inside and outside yourself.”

**Use Wonder & Curiosity**

***Just this moment, just this task...Five Senses Meditation***

1. Get yourself in a comfortable position whatever that means for you, either seated or lying down.
2. Take a few deep breaths. Maybe in through the nose initially, and then out through the mouth. With each exhalation allow your body to soften a bit more. Allow your body to settle into its natural rhythm of breathing.
3. First, using your sense of sight observe 5 things you can see, just observe as if observing for the very first time
4. Next, 4 things you can hear
5. 3 things you can touch
6. 2 things you can smell
7. Finally, 1 thing you can taste

What was that experience like for you? What did you notice?

(Connect to) **S**enses during Routine Activities

- Breaks
- Walking
- Eating
- Brushing Teeth
- Drinking Coffee/Tea
- Playing with a Pet

Other Ideas?

## Open to possibilities

“Consider all the possibilities today.

Forget if the glass is half full or half empty, you are holding the jug doing the pouring.

The jug is the world of resources available ready and waiting for you to use.

What resources will you access today?”

Daniela Falecki @ [www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au](http://www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au)

### Do Something Each Day for Your Mind, Body & Being

Mind	Body	Being
Read/write a book	Practice yoga/stretch	Put yourself in the present moment (e.g., Meditation)
Do a puzzle	Go for a walk/run	Open your heart to self-compassion
Work on a lesson	Eat balanced meals	Read meaningful poetry/inspirational quotes/connect spiritually
Do a hobby	Do jumping jacks on commercial breaks	Affirm “This too shall pass”
Create	Drink water	Imagine a relaxing scene
Journal	Take a shower	Take a brief vacation/pull the covers over your head



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**Just this moment, just this task...[STOP Meditation by Elisha Goldstein](#)**

**S - Stop**

Stop what you're doing right now, get yourself in a comfortable position whatever that means for you, either seated or lying down.

**T - Take**

Take a few deep breaths. Maybe in through the nose initially, and then out through the mouth. With each exhalation allow your body to soften a bit more. As long as you're here with the breath right now, allow your body to settle into its natural rhythm of breathing. Breathe in and sense the breath coming in. Breathe out and sense the breath going out. Allow your body to take the breath it needs in its natural rhythm of being alive.

**O - Observe**

Begin to observe your body, noticing if there's any tension or tightness anywhere, including the face. If you do notice any of that just allow it to soften, or just mindfully adjust your body as it feels like it needs to. Be aware of how you're feeling emotionally right now. If there's a sense of calm or ease, maybe some restlessness or irritation, or maybe even sadness. Or you could be feeling neutral. Whatever's there, see if you can be aware of it and notice how it feels physically in the body. Continue to observe yourself physically and emotionally in this moment, just letting things be. Be aware of and observe your mind right now, noticing if it seems distracted or cluttered or if it seems like it's settling into being here. Either way, it's OK—the "o" of observe is just to allow us to be aware of our experience in the moment; physically, emotionally, and mentally. The moment we notice that our mind is off is a moment we're present. Settle in, be aware of the fullness of your experience physically, emotionally, and mentally, and just let be.

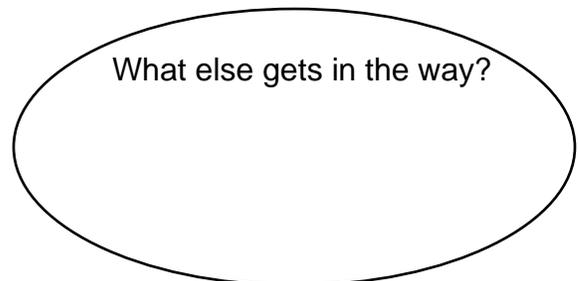
**P - Proceed**

Proceed is just dropping the question of: "What's most important for me to pay attention to right now?" or "What am I needing right now?" Allow whatever answer is there to simply percolate and arise. Proceed with that in this next moment. Always remember to acknowledge yourself for taking this time. This is a great act of self-care; take the final moment to acknowledge yourself for taking this time.

This is an excellent meditation to use when you begin to feel overwhelmed – when you connect to your senses and feel that tightening of the chest, perhaps some ringing in the ears, or shortness of breath. Just STOP, breathe, observe then proceed.

**What gets in the way: What are the Barriers?**

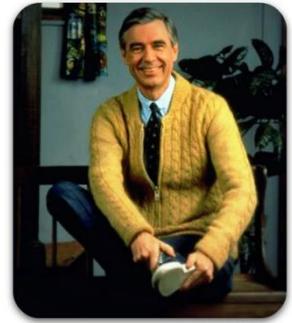
- Stress
- Wrestling with comparing & judging mind
  - "Shoulds"
- Big feelings mind
  - Shame
  - Sadness
  - Fear
- Unrealistic expectations from self and others



“There are no “should” or “should not” when it comes to having feelings. They’re part of who we are, and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings.”

---Mister Fred Rogers

The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember



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‘FACE COVID’ <https://youtu.be/BmvNCdpHUYM> Video Dr. Russ Harris

You can find additional information about FACE COVID concepts at the end of these guided notes

Video Notes:

## Open to possibilities

### ***Is it possible that...***

I can be overwhelmed **AND** interact with loving kindness because that is what I value.

### ***Is it possible that...***

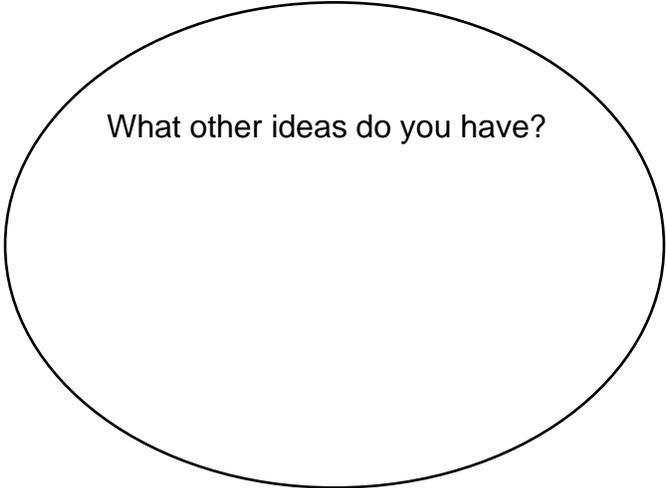
I can squeeze in 2 minutes of deep breathing **AND** grade papers for 10 minutes **AND** feel overworked and under appreciated.

### ***I am curious if...***

I use a guided meditation app 2 times per week before I go to bed if **it will have an impact** on my sleep.

## Getting Unstuck

- Mindfulness & Meditation
  - Connecting to your Senses
- Getting to a place of AND & changing perspective
  - What is and out of your control
  - Acceptance
- Physical activity
- Coping Ahead
- Pro/Con
- Writing mini goals



What other ideas do you have?

## **A**rrange your environment

- Clear clutter
- Put up reminders
- Ask for help
- Set up materials ahead of time
- Put up motivators/inspirational signs

## Arrange your environment

I will put *reminders* in my workspace of kind words and encouraging statements to remind me I can interact with kindness when I am overwhelmed because that is what I value.

I'll use the *alarm on my phone* to remind me to do 2-min of deep breathing and 10-min of grading - I'll use my favorite song as the ring tone to pair it with something pleasant.

I'll *download a free app* like *Insight Timer* or *headspace* & listen to the guided meditation 2x per week and see if I sleep better.

## Reinforce & Accumulate Positives

- Celebrate the small successes
- Remember your passions
- Connect with others & share your successes
- Write out gratitude lists & share them
- Spread kindness
- Practice self-compassion

What other ideas do you have?

## Wellness Tips to Help You S.O.A.R.

(Connect to your) **S**enses

**O**pen to possibilities

**A**rrange your environment

**R**einforce

Review

- Learn and practice 3 mindfulness exercises (breath, 5 senses, STOP)
- Identify infinite possibilities for wellness & potential barriers
- Identify supports to get “unstuck” and create lasting change

## Resource Practices

[Three Minute De-Stressor for Teachers](#)

[Self-Compassion Break for Adults](#)

[Taking Care of Your Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) <https://youtu.be/IsJus1R15Ds>

Progressive Muscle Relaxation & Relaxation Exercises (PDF Scripts Provided)

## Apps

[Insight Timer](#)

[headspace app Covid-19 \(free for educators plus special meditations and activities for now!\)](#)

## Articles & Other Resources

[Supporting Learning and Well-Being During the Coronavirus](#) (Greater Good Science Center)

[How Teachers can Navigate Difficult Emotions During School Closures](#) (Greater Good Science Center)

[Maintaining Relationships During School Closures](#) (Edutopia)

["The CALM Reminder" Semple Willard – Google Access Book](#) (Semple Willard)

[Free Mindfulness Resources for Calm during Covid Outbreak from Mindful Magazine](#)

COVID-19\_for\_families\_Harvard Center on the Developing Child (PDF)

### **Citations (Books)**

- Coleman M. (2019). *From Suffering to Peace: The true promise of mindfulness*. New World Library.
- Forsyth, J. P. & Eifert, G. H., (2007). *The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety: A guide to breaking free from anxiety, phobias, worry using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- Hanson, R. & Hanson, F. (2018). *Resilient: How to grow an unshakable core of calm, strength and happiness*. Harmony Books.
- Harris, R. (2009). *ACT Made Simple: A quick start guide to ACT basics and beyond*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- Linehan, M. (2015). *DBT® skills training and handbook (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Guilford Publications.
- Rogers, F. (2003). *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important things to remember*. Hyperion.

### **Citations (Other)**

- Falecki, D. @ [www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au](http://www.teacher-wellbeing.com.au)
- [Happify](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4) Mindfulness As a Superpower Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>
- Harris, R. 'FACE COVID' <https://youtu.be/BmvNCdpHUYM>
- [World Health Organization Definition of Wellbeing](#)

# 'FACE COVID'

*How to respond effectively to the Corona crisis*  
by Dr Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap*

'FACE COVID' is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the Corona crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Here's a quick summary of the key steps, and in the pages that follow we'll explore them all in more depth:

**F = Focus on what's in your control**

**A = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings**

**C = Come back into your body**

**E = Engage in what you're doing**

**C = Committed action**

**O = Opening up**

**V = Values**

**I = Identify resources**

**D = Disinfect & distance**

Let's now explore these, one by one

## **F = Focus on what's in your control**

The Corona crisis can affect us in many different ways: physically, emotionally, economically, socially, and psychologically. All of us are (or soon will be) dealing with the very real challenges of widespread serious illness and the inabilities of healthcare systems to cope with it, social and community disruption, economic fallout and financial problems, obstacles and interruptions to many aspects of life ... and the list goes on.

And when we are facing a crisis of any sort, fear and anxiety are inevitable; they are normal, natural responses to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty. It's all too easy to get lost in worrying and ruminating about all sorts of things that are out of your control: what might happen in the future; how the virus might affect you or your loved ones or your community or your country or the world – and what will happen then - and so on. And while it's completely natural for us to get lost in such worries, it's not useful or helpful. Indeed the more we focus on what's *not* in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we're likely to feel.

So the single most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis – Corona-related or otherwise - is to: ***focus on what's in your control.***

You can't control what happens in the future. You can't control Corona virus itself or the world economy or how your government manages this whole sordid mess. And you can't magically control your feelings, eliminating all that perfectly natural fear and anxiety. But you can control *what you do* - here and now. And that matters.

Because *what you do* - here and now - can make a huge difference to yourself, and anyone living with you, and a significant difference to the community around you.

The reality is, we all have far more control over our behaviour, than we do over our thoughts and feelings. So our number one aim is to take control of our behaviour - right here and now - to respond effectively to this crisis.

This involves both dealing with our inner world – all our difficult thoughts and feelings - and our outer world – all the real problems we are facing. How do we do this? Well, when a big storm blows up, the boats in the harbour drop anchor – because if they don't, they'll get swept out to sea. And of course, dropping anchor doesn't make the storm go away (anchors can't control the weather) - but it can hold a boat steady in the harbour, until the storm passes in its own good time.

Similarly, in an ongoing crisis, we're all going to experience 'emotional storms': unhelpful thoughts spinning inside our head, and painful feelings whirling around our body. And if we're swept away by that storm inside us, there's nothing effective we can do. So the first practical step is to 'drop anchor', using the simple ACE formula:

**A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings**

**C = Come back into your body**

**E = Engage in what you're doing**

Let's explore these one by one:

**A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings**

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world. As you do this, often it's helpful to put this into words, and silently say to yourself something like, 'I'm noticing anxiety', or 'Here's grief', or 'There's my mind worrying' or 'I'm having a feeling of sadness' or 'I'm having thoughts about getting sick'.

And while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, also ....

**C = Come back into your body**

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing

Note: you are not trying to turn away from, escape, avoid or distract yourself from what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence .... and at the same time, come back into and connect with your body, and actively move it. Why? So you can gain as much control as possible over your physical actions, even though you can't control your feelings. (Remember, F = Focus on what's in your control)

And as you acknowledge your thoughts & feelings, and come back into your body, also ....

## **E = Engage in what you're doing**

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following suggestions, or find your own methods:

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
- Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
- Notice what you are doing
- End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand. (And if you don't have any meaningful activity to do, see the next 3 steps.)

Ideally, run through the ACE cycle slowly 3 or 4 times, to turn it into a 2- 3 minute exercise.

If you wish, to help you get the hang of this, you can download some free audio recordings of 'dropping anchor' exercises, varying from 1 minute to 11 minutes in length. You can listen to these and use them as a guide to help you develop this skill. You can download or stream them from the left hand box on this webpage: <https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/free-audio/>

*NOTE: please don't skip the A of ACE; it's so important to keep acknowledging the thoughts and feelings present, especially if they are difficult or uncomfortable. If you skip the A, this exercise will turn into a distraction technique – which it's not supposed to be.*

Dropping anchor is a very useful skill. You can use it for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively; switching off auto-pilot and engaging in life; grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations; disrupting rumination, obsessing and worrying; and focusing your attention on the task or activity you are doing. The better you anchor yourself in the here and now, the more control you have over your actions – which makes it a lot easier to do the next steps: **COVID**

## **C = Committed Action**

Committed action means effective action, guided by your core values; action you take because it's truly important to you; action you take even if it brings up difficult thoughts and feelings. Once you have dropped anchor, using the ACE formula, you will have a lot of control over your actions – so this makes it easier to do the things that truly matter. Now obviously that includes all those protective measures against Corona – frequent handwashing, social distancing, and so on. But in addition to those fundamentals of effective action, consider:

What are simple ways to look after yourself, those you live with, and those you can realistically help? What kind, caring, supportive deeds you can do?

Can you say some kind words to someone in distress – in person or via a phone call or text message?

Can you help someone out with a task or a chore, or cook a meal, or hold someone's hand, or play a game with a young child?

Can you comfort and soothe someone who is sick? Or in the most serious of cases, nurse them and access whatever medical assistance is available?

And if you're spending a lot more time at home, through self-isolation or forced quarantine, or social distancing, what are the most effective ways to spend that time?

You may want to consider physical exercise to stay fit, cooking (as) healthy food (as possible, given restrictions), and doing meaningful activities by yourself or with others.

And if you're familiar with acceptance and commitment therapy or other mindfulness-based approaches, how can you actively practice some of those mindfulness skills?

Repeatedly throughout the day, ask yourself 'What can I *do* right now - no matter how small it may be - that improves life for myself or others I live with, or people in my community?' And whatever the answer is – do it, and engage in it fully.

## **O = Opening up**

Opening up means making room for difficult feelings and being kind to yourself. Difficult feelings are guaranteed to keep on showing up as this crisis unfolds: fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loneliness, frustration, confusion, and many more.

We can't stop them from arising; they're normal reactions. But we can open up and make room for them: acknowledge they are normal, allow them to be there (even though they hurt), and treat ourselves kindly.

Remember, self-kindness is essential if you want to cope well with this crisis – especially if you are in a caregiver role. If you've ever flown on a plane, you've heard this message: 'In event of an emergency, put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.' Well, self-kindness is your own oxygen mask; if you need to look after others, you'll do it a whole lot better if you're also taking good care of yourself.

So ask yourself, 'If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling – if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? How would I behave towards them? What might I say or do?' Then try treating yourself the same way.

For more on self-kindness, also known as self-compassion, read this eBook:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\\_Q3UcT9Q8VuSbiRm7x7-xjaxy5xkrba/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_Q3UcT9Q8VuSbiRm7x7-xjaxy5xkrba/view?usp=sharing)

## **V = Values**

Committed action should be guided by your core values: What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis? What sort of person do you want to be, as you go through this? How do you want to treat yourself and others?

Your values might include love, respect, humour, patience, courage, honesty, caring, openness, kindness .... or numerous others. Look for ways to 'sprinkle' these values into your day. Let them guide and motivate your committed action.

Of course, as this crisis unfolds, there will be all sorts of obstacles in your life; goals you can't achieve, things you can't do, problems for which there are no simple solutions. But you can still live your values in a myriad of different ways, even in the face of all those challenges. Especially come back to your values of kindness and caring. Consider:

What are kind, caring ways you can treat yourself as you go through this?

What are kind words you can say to yourself, kind deeds you can do for yourself?

What are kind ways you can treat others who are suffering?

What are kind, caring ways of contributing to the wellbeing of your community?

What can you say and do that will enable you to look back in years to come and feel proud of your response?

## **I = Identify resources**

Identify resources for help, assistance, support, and advice. This includes friends, family, neighbours, health professionals, emergency services. And make sure you know the emergency helpline phone numbers, including psychological help if required.

Also reach out to your social networks. And if you are able to offer support to others, let them know; you can be a resource for other people, just as they can for you.

One very important aspect of this process involves finding a *reliable and trustworthy* source of information for updates on the crisis and guidelines for responding to it. The World Health Organisation website is the leading source of such information:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Also check the website of your country's government health department.

Use this information to develop your own resources: action plans to protect yourself and others, and to prepare in advance for quarantine or emergency.

## **D = Disinfect & distance physically**

I'm sure you already know this, but it's worth repeating: disinfect your hands regularly and practice as much social distancing as realistically possible, for the greater good of your community. And remember, we're talking about physical distancing – not cutting off emotionally. (If you aren't quite sure about what this means, read this:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public> )

This is an important aspect of committed action, so align it deeply with your values; recognise that these are truly caring actions.

## **In Summary**

So again and again and again, as problems pile up in the world around you, and emotional storms rage in the world within you, come back to the steps of FACE COVID:

**F = Focus on what's in your control**

**A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings**

**C = Come back into your body**

**E = Engage in what you're doing**

**C = Committed action**

**O = Opening up**

**V = Values**

**I = Identify resources**

**D = Disinfect & distance**

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, I do hope there's something useful in here for you; and feel free to share this with others if you think may find it helpful.

These are crazy, difficult, scary times, so please do treat yourself kindly. And remember the words of Winston Churchill: *'When you're going through hell, keep going'*.

All the best,

Cheers, Russ Harris

# progressive muscle relaxation

One of the body's reactions to fear and anxiety is muscle tension. This can result in feeling "tense", or can lead to muscle aches and pains, as well as leaving some people feeling exhausted. Think about how you respond to anxiety. Do you "tense up" when you're feeling anxious? Muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful in cases where anxiety is especially associated to muscle tension. This information sheet will guide you through a common form of relaxation designed to reduce muscle tension.

## Muscle tension

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense, but perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw feels tight, or maybe your shoulders become. Muscle tension can also be associated with backaches and tension headaches.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One method of reducing muscle tension that people have found helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, and then you practise this technique consistently.

### preparing for relaxation

When you are beginning to practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises keep in mind the following points.

- **Physical injuries.** If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.
- **Select your surroundings.** Minimise the distraction to your five senses. Such as turning off the TV and radio, and using soft lighting.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
- **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming any intoxicants, such as alcohol.

### general procedure

- 1 Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
- 2 When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- 3 Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "Relax" as you relax the muscle.
- 4 When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

## Relaxation sequence

1. **Right hand and forearm.** Make a fist with your right hand.
2. **Right upper arm.** Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. **Left hand and forearm.**
4. **Left upper arm.**
5. **Forehead.** Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. **Eyes and cheeks.** Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. **Mouth and jaw.** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you're yawning.
8. **Neck. !!!** Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. **Shoulders.** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. **Shoulder blades/Back.** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. **Chest and stomach.** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. **Hips and buttocks.** Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. **Right upper leg.** Tighten your right thigh.
14. **Right lower leg. !!!** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. **Right foot.** Curl your toes downwards.
16. **Left upper leg.** Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. **Left lower leg.** Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. **Left foot.** Repeat as for right foot.

**Practice means progress.** Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practising consistently is the key.

## Relaxation and Relaxation Exercises

When we are under stress the body goes into survival mode. It produces stress hormones, which gear us up to respond to perceived danger. This has come to be known as the “fight or flight” response. In that state, the heart rate increases, respiration becomes rapid and shallow, there is a rise in blood pressure, and the brain itself moves into a primitive “survival” mode, suppressing normal thought functions (evaluation, planning, deciding, encoding memory normally, etc.). The result of this is that we react rather than being able to evaluate and plan a response to the stressor. Under certain circumstances, the body may be in a constant state of “fight or flight,” which is exhausting and can contribute to the development of physical stress-related disorders, such as cardiac problems, chronic high blood pressure, and increased risk of stroke.

### Tips for relaxation

Find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted for at least 30 minutes. Turn the lights down if you like. It's helpful to wear loose, comfortable clothing. If there is unavoidable noise, it may help to put on some background music or a tape of natural sounds. Turn off the phone and give yourself permission to devote some time to self-care.

You may sit or lie down for relaxation. If you sit in a chair, it's preferable to have your spine straight and supported by the chair back. If you lie down, you may want your back flat, and legs straight. It's preferable to have your legs uncrossed, extended, so you can feel the flow of energy. These are all just suggestions, however; the most important thing is that you feel comfortable and free to position yourself as you need.

Research shows that relaxing the body will relax the mind, and vice versa. If you struggle with racing, obsessive or intrusive thoughts, it might help to focus on the body. If you have a lot of physical tension or pain, it may be better to work on relaxing the mind. It's hard to predict which exercise will work for whom; it's best to try different relaxation exercises until you find the one that feels right. Remember that you are practicing a skill – like playing the piano. The more you practice, the more effective your relaxation work becomes.

It is important to work toward an attitude of acceptance of whatever occurs in your session, rather than growing impatient if you don't achieve a given result. You are just exploring the sensations or images you choose to focus on, and noticing what happens physically, emotionally and mentally. This “mindful” approach will pay off, and you will eventually be able to experience a state shift – that is a deep, peaceful state of relaxation. As you get better and better at the mindful self-observation, you will be able to use it all the time, to notice what is going on in your body, to notice your emotions, and to pay attention to the thoughts that may be contributing to your emotional distress.

It is helpful to start out each relaxation exercise by doing a simple check in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise involves systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. This is a good relaxation exercise for those who have trouble concentrating, or experience racing thoughts or other mental distractions. You may leave your eyes open or close them, as you prefer. Experiment with how much you tense your target muscles: some find tensing tightly is most helpful, while others use “threshold tensing,” just tightening enough to barely sense the tension.

Start out by taking a few deep breaths into the abdomen. Just notice the breath.

Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Make a fist with your right hand, and tense the muscles in your right forearm, allowing the rest of the arm to remain relaxed.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it's like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out, or a any image that works for you.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left fist and forearm.

Raise your right shoulder, pin your right upper arm to the side of your body, and tense the muscles in the right upper arm and shoulder.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Find an image that captures this gradual release of tension for you: the sun melting ice, butter melting, releasing pressure with a valve, et cetera.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left upper arm and shoulder.

With your leg extended, bend your right foot up at an angle, so the muscles of your right calf, shin, ankle and foot are tensed. Allow the rest of the leg to remain relaxed.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of the leg, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it's like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left foot and lower leg.

Tense the muscles in the right buttock and thigh, allowing the remaining muscles in the right leg to remain as relaxed as possible.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite buttock and thigh, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this on the left side.

Suck in your abdominal muscles, and simultaneously push the small of your back against the chair or floor. Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Let your head fall forward, or, alternatively, press your head backward against a wall, to tense the muscles in the back of your neck.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Push your tongue against your upper palette, purse your lips, squint your eyes, tighten your jaw and scrunch up your face.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Take a few slow, deep breaths, and allow yourself to be aware of the sensations throughout your body. If there is any part that remains tense, repeat the exercise there until the tension is gone. Just allow the relaxation to move through your body in waves, allowing yourself to relax more, and more, and more deeply as you continue to take slow, deep breaths. If you like the seashore, you may want to think of gentle waves lapping at the sand, gradually washing away physical, and emotional, and mental tension, smoothing ... soothing ...relaxing.

When you are done with the relaxation exercise, allow yourself a few minutes to reorient before getting up. Just enjoy the sensations of relaxation throughout your body. You may notice sensations you have never been aware of before.

## **Meditation on the Breath**

Sit in a chair with the spine straight and supported and the feet flat on the floor. Or, you may lie down flat on your back.

Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Let your body begin to relax, consciously releasing tension. Begin to follow the breath. The stance for meditation and relaxation is always compassionate and curious, never judgmental or rigid. Notice the sensations as you take a breath in through your nose, inhale it through your throat, and into the lungs. Notice the sensations as the lungs expand to full capacity. Hold the breath for a moment, and notice how that feels. Then exhale slowly and completely, through the lips, and notice the release of tension in the lungs and rib cage. Pause briefly again before taking the next breath. Now, just allow your breathing be natural. Focus your attention on the subtle sensations of breathing.

If you like, you may imagine that you are sending warm, healing energy to every cell in your body with every in-breath, and washing away tension, pain and left over emotions with each out-breath. Just allow yourself to relax into each breath.

Your mind will probably wander after a few breaths. As thoughts intrude on your breath mindfulness, just notice them, label them as thoughts, and allow them to pass by unexplored, as if you were idly watching clouds float through a summer sky. Each time your attention wanders, just notice that and return your focus gently to your breath.

If you like, you may add a “mantra” to this breath meditation. For example, on the in-breath you may silently say the word “CALM” and on the out-breath, the word “CLEAR” (any combination you choose that suggests relaxation and letting go is fine). Just continue to breathe, slow deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the lips, focusing on the sensations, and returning to the breath each time the mind wanders.

Practicing this breath meditation has many advantages. Deep abdominal breaths cue the autonomic nervous system to relax. It is a very simple and effective way to relax the body quickly. It also allows you to notice what is happening in your body. It is helpful to discipline the mind to focus on a neutral or pleasant subject, rather than allowing it to be dominated by unpleasant, intrusive thoughts. Over time, you will gradually learn to focus and quiet your mind and calm your body by following your breath.

## Sitting Relaxation

Sit in a chair with your spine straight and your back supported. Let your legs extend outward from the chair, with your feet flat on the floor.

Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Focus on the sensations of your hips and thighs sitting on the chair. Notice the solidity of the chair, and the surface that supports your weight. Feel the soles of your feet, noticing the whole surface where they are in contact with the floor. Give yourself permission to give in to gravity and let the chair and floor support your weight.

Take a few slow, deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Focus on the feeling of the breath, the movement of your chest, rib cage, shoulders, the expansion of your lungs. Now imagine that you are breathing through the soles of your feet. As you take breath, imagine that you are bringing warm, healing energy to every cell of your body. As you breathe out, imagine that cleansing your body of tension, pain, and old, left over emotions.

As you breathe in, imagine filling your feet up with this positive, relaxing energy. Notice the warm, pleasant sensations moving into your toes, the balls of your feet, your arches, heels, insteps, and all through your feet. Give yourself the time you need to allow this to happen. Continue to focus on your feet until they feel completely relaxed and comfortable.

Take another breath in, and imagine it filling up your ankles and lower legs. If you can't immediately sense a part of your body, you might try rubbing or kneading it. Continue to move up through the calves and shins. Always take the time needed to work your way through the given part, allowing yourself to sense the shift in sensation. Move gradually into your knees, feeling the warmth move into them, then the backs of your thighs, tops of your thighs ... pelvis ... buttocks ... belly ... the small of your back ... midriff ... middle back ... chest ... upper back. Imagine the warm, relaxing energy moving through all your internal organs. Fill your lungs with the healing energy. As you continue to breathe, let the energy move into your shoulders, and upper arms, into your elbows, lower arms, wrists, palms, and fingers. Allowing the arms to remain relaxed, return to the shoulders and, again, fill them with warm, healing energy. Let the breath take this warm, relaxing energy up into the back of the neck, taking all the time you need to let the relaxing sensations massage and relax the neck muscles, then into the front of the neck, the throat, the tongue, the jaw, cheeks, the muscles around the mouth, nose and eyes, the temples and around and inside the ears, the scalp, the base of the skull. Take all the time you need for the relaxing sensations to fill and warm each part of your body.

Continue to breathe, and imagine your whole body is filled with glowing, golden light. You might imagine you are sitting on an elevator, and that, as it descends, floor by floor, you become more and more deeply relaxed. Just notice the changes you experience in your body as this happens. Appreciate the sense of peacefulness and calm and the pleasant sensations that you feel. Tell yourself that you can remain relaxed throughout the day, and that you will return to the room feeling calm and peaceful, but alert and energetic.

If you can't feel the warmth in parts of your body when you first try this exercise, or if there are parts of your body you can't feel at all, stay with it. You are working on establishing the connections you need to sense what is occurring in your body, which is crucial for healthy physical and emotional function.

## Guided Imagery

Imagine going to a place, real or invented, where you feel safe, peaceful and calm. You want to take the time to develop the imagery so you fully experience this place with all your senses.

Start out with a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what's happening, without judgment or expectation. Let your breath deepen, and locate a spot in your body where you are starting to feel an opening, a lightness, or a loosening. Allow that to expand with every in-breath and every out-breath, imagining it gradually filling up your entire body. Imagine this relaxing energy moving through your body in waves, reaching every part of you.

### Sea Shore

Imagine you are at the sea shore on a beautiful day. It's the perfect time of day, and the perfect time of year for you to be there. Recall the feeling you get in your body when you are at the beach, or what it was like when you were there as a child. Let yourself explore that feeling.

Imagine the warmth of the sun on the top of your head and your shoulders. Allow this image to develop. Perhaps there's a pleasant breeze, which you feel on your face and arms. Imagine the refreshing, salty breeze off the water, and breathe. Maybe you can even taste the salt spray.

Look up and down the beach and notice the expanse of sand, the color and texture of it, the way it sparkles in the sunlight. Imagine that you are standing in the dry, soft, sand, and feel it beneath your feet and between your toes. Imagine taking a few steps, and feeling what it's like to walk in deep, warm, soft sand. Move closer to the water and walk in the cool, firm sand. Feel it take on the shape of your feet as you walk. Look behind you and see your footprints. Notice the waves gently rolling in and lapping the shore, gradually smoothing those footprints out, rhythmically washing them away as the waves roll back out.

Look at the edge of the water and notice the color. Notice that color meeting the sand, and the waves gently lapping on the shore, rolling in, breaking softly, and going back out, over and over, endlessly. Hear the, deep, calming, rhythmic sound of the waves breaking on the beach. Look out to the horizon, and notice the waves as far back as you can see, rolling toward the shore, breaking, glittering in the sunlight. Notice the dancing light moving rhythmically across the whole surface of the water. Notice the place where the surf meets the sky, and see where the colors come together. Notice the light. Let yourself feel the expanse of the sky, and imagine breathing that in, filling yourself with that feeling of spaciousness, brightness and light.

If you like, you might imagine going into the water, and feeling gently carried on the waves, safe in the protected cove, warmed by the sun. Just rolling gently on the surf, carried safely on the buoyant waves.

When you come out of the water, find the clean, dry, soft towel you have placed there. Imagine lying down on the towel, feeling the warm sand beneath mold itself to your body. Notice how the warm, firm surface supports your whole body, and allow yourself to relax deeply into it, letting the warmth and comfort fill your body and mind.

When you have finished your guided meditation, take a few minutes to sit quietly, noticing what you are experiencing in your body, what your thoughts and emotions are like.

Other ideas for guided meditation: walking through a meadow, floating in the clouds, snorkeling in a coral reef, sitting by a fire in a cozy cabin, being in lovely, comfortable room, or in bed on a rainy day.

## **Rapid Relaxation Exercises**

These are things you can do in a minute or two to feel more relaxed. As you start, take a moment to do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

### **Abdominal Breathing**

Abdominal breathing is the one of the most effective ways to relax quickly. By breathing with your diaphragm you will immediately signal your autonomic nervous system to relax. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Take some slow, deep breaths into the belly. It's helpful, but not essential, to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. If you are doing abdominal breathing correctly, the lower hand should move as much or more than the hand on your chest. Continue this slow, deep breathing for a couple of minutes, imagining the breath calming your body and clearing your mind. Notice how you feel.

### **Cook's Hookup**

With legs extended, cross your left ankle over your right one. With your arms outstretched, cross your right wrist over your left one, then turn your hands so the palms are touching, clasp your fingers, and twist your hands down and toward your ribs, and rest them on your chest. Hold this. Once you have learned the technique, you don't need to use the hands if you prefer not to. position for two minutes as you breathe through your nose. On the in-breath, push your tongue against your upper palette, and on the out-breath push it against your lower palette. When the two minute period has elapsed, take a minute to notice what you experience in your body.

### **Quick Tensing and Relaxing**

Tense your feet and lower legs and thighs and buttocks, pelvic muscles, abdomen, and lower back muscles. Hold them tightly for a few moments and notice the tension. Then release the tension completely and let all those muscles soften and become supple and relaxed.

Tense your hands, forearms, upper arms and shoulders, belly, midriff, middle and upper back, and facial muscles, and take a breath in so your rib cage is full extended. Notice how that feels, then release the breath and soften all those muscles, letting them become supple and relaxed. As you continue to breathe, focus on releasing, softening, letting go. Let the tension continue to flow out with every out-breath.

### **Creating a Symbol of Relaxation**

When you are practicing relaxation, choose an image that conveys peace, comfort, or mental and physical letting go. This image can be anything you choose. You may think of the seashore, or a favorite spot in nature. It may be an image like the sun, a rope untwisting, ice melting, or a soothing color. It may be the face of a pet or of someone you love.

Every time you do relaxation, call up that image as you are becoming relaxed. Allow the symbol to grow and fill your awareness. Let all of the qualities of that symbol come to mind, and imagine them moving through your body on the rhythm of your breath. As you practice this more, you will be able to close your eyes anywhere and relax quickly by calling up your symbol and filling your awareness with it for a few minutes.



# How to Support Children (and Yourself) During the COVID-19 Outbreak



The coronavirus outbreak has changed many things about our daily lives. But even during this uncertain time, it's a sure thing that our children are still learning, growing, and developing.

Everyone can help support a child's healthy development (and it may even help relieve your stress!). Just a few minutes and some simple, free activities can make a difference.

**1** Practice “**serve and return**,” or back-and-forth interaction with your little ones. Even before they learn to talk, infants and children reach out for attention—babbling, gesturing, or making faces. When young children “serve up” a chance to engage with them, it's important to “return” with attention. It can be as simple as a game of peek-a-boo. Or, if a toddler points at a toy, name it out loud as you hand it to the child.

**Why?** [Serve-and-return interactions](#) help build developing brains and [resilience](#), something we all need in these challenging times.



## *Helpful Resources:*

Video: [5 Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

Handout: [Serve and Return for Parents & Caregivers](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

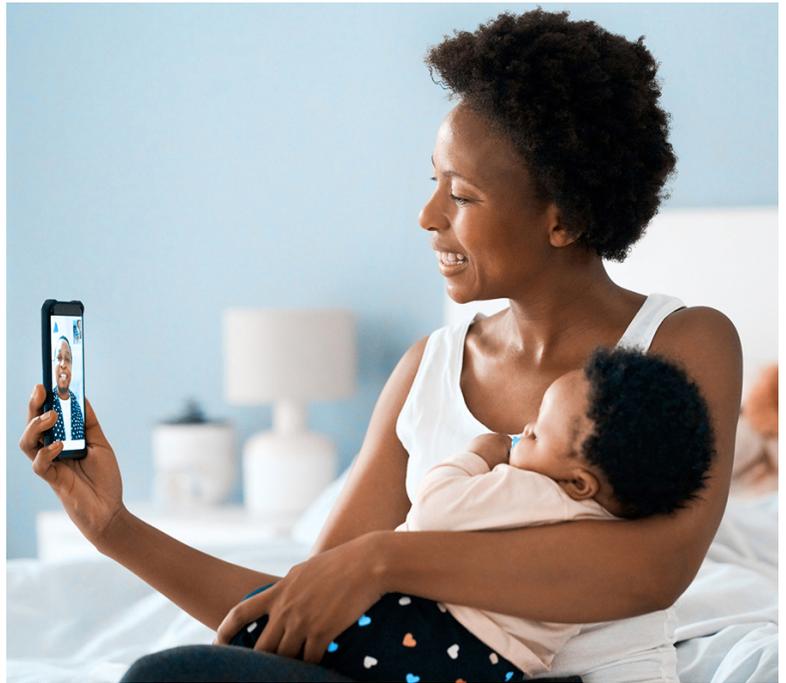
Podcast: [The Brain Architects: Serve and Return](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

Video: [Mini Parenting Master Class with Center Director Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.](#) (UNICEF)

Smartphone Apps: [Vroom](#) and [Kinedu](#)

**2 Maintain social connections.** Stay-at-home measures are helping to slow the spread of the virus, protect our health, and protect our hospitals. But, while we are staying apart from each other physically, it's even more important to connect socially, to protect our emotional well-being. Keep up relationships and social contacts—while maintaining physical distance outside your own home.

**Why?** Responsive relationships—like those with lots of serve and return interactions (see #1 above)—between children and adults, adults and other adults, and children and other children all help buffer us against [the effects of ongoing stress](#).



#### *Tips & Helpful Resources:*

**Talk with family and friends via video chat or phone.** This is a great way to connect children with other adults (and give you a short break!).

If talking live isn't an option, **write emails or old-fashioned letters to friends and family.** Encourage children to ask questions of their grandparents and other adults.

**Make encouraging posters and signs** and put them in your windows to support your neighbors. This can also be a fun craft project to do with children!

**Go outside and say hello** to neighbors, friends, people passing by. Just make sure to keep at least 6 feet away from anyone who doesn't live with you.

Article: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Physical Distancing and Family Wellbeing](#) (Raising Children Network)

Article: [Keeping Classroom Connections Alive](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education)

Article: [Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Child Trends)

**3** **Take a break** (with or without children). If you feel overwhelmed, find a way to give your stress response a rest. Take a walk around the block. Try a few minutes of meditation or deep breathing. Call a friend (*see #2 above*).

And, **give yourself a break**. Remember you're not alone—everyone is struggling with these unexpected changes to our lives, and many of us need some extra support from our communities. Be kind to yourself and understand that you can't do it all.

**Why?** When you can find ways to give yourself a break, you'll return to your children better able to meet their needs and support their development.



Photo by Natalia Figueredo on Unsplash

#### *Helpful Resources:*

Infographic: [What We Can Do About Toxic Stress](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

Video: [Stress and Resilience: How Toxic Stress Affects Us, and What We Can Do About It](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

Brief: [The Science of Resilience](#) (Center on the Developing Child)

Article: [COVID-19: Stress and Coping](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Article: [COVID-19: Taking Care of Your Emotional Health](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Tool: [Free Meditations for Reducing Stress](#) (Calm.com)

#### *For More Information & Resources:*

Many communities and organizations offer supports and services such as crisis hotlines, food delivery, and relief funds. If you don't know how to find them, **call 211** in the U.S. and Canada to speak to someone who can help you get connected or visit: [211.org/services/covid19](https://211.org/services/covid19).

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has compiled [a list of additional coronavirus-related resources](#) for parents, caregivers, and others.

## **Heroes in Your Home: Finding, Encouraging, and Celebrating Them**

Thomas G. Szabo, Sarah Richling, Dennis Embry, Tony Biglan, & Kelly G. Wilson

The authors are behavior scientists and members of Nurturing in Place, a consortium working to assist families in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Portions of this article appeared previously in *Behavior Analysis in Practice*.

Over the past fifty years, behavior scientists have amassed a wealth of knowledge about ways to empower children, aid their learning, generate everyone's cooperation in the home, ensure safety, and most importantly, have fun as a family. An overwhelming number of studies show that simple recipes described below can be applied by families to produce positive changes during difficult times. Taken together, these studies show the importance of three strategies: 1) creating consistent routines with built-in play, 2) celebrating the things others do that work, and 3) building connections to make every member of the family a hero. In essence, we'll experience the most satisfaction when we shift our thinking from how to solve the problem of raising kids during social distancing to how we can channel their "superpowers" and bring out their heroism. Below, we offer a thumbnail for how to use these three recipes to transform your family from being helpless to being heroes.

### **Creating Consistent Routines with Built-In Play**

Research demonstrates that routines help to promote stability in uncertain times. Providing visual family "Rule Reminders" can help you make desired behavior easier to remember. You and your kids might also create colorful "Sight Schedules" to promote structure and facilitate activity transitions. Another strategy is to make chores and transitions fun by playing "Beat the Timer." This is a game where everyone wins and earns something fun when individuals beat their last time at completing a task. An additional research-based practice "tootling," which kids quickly learn is the opposite of tattling. Give each of your family

members cards with spaces for writing another person's name and what they have done. Instruct them to look for others being helpful and to write a tootle to be posted on the wall, read aloud, or placed in a photo album of praiseworthy moments. Making a visual reminder of family rules, a sight schedule, beating the timer, and offering tootles to others are four heroic practices that you can adopt to build playful structure into your family's daily routines.

### **Celebrating Each Other's Successes**

Dozens of studies have shown the powerful impacts of families setting behavioral expectations together, establishing brief intervals in which to meet the expectations, and celebrating. You can begin this "Good Behavior Game" by asking every member of your family what they'd like to see, hear, feel, and do *more of* and also *less of* in the home. Make a colorful map together of these things. Then, establish an expectation such as "we will all work on our chores," set a timer for one or two minutes, and begin. If everyone works for the entire interval, celebrate with giggle fests, tickles, or game time. The next step is to increase the work time by adding two minutes and making sure everyone succeeds before increasing the requirement again.

Other research has demonstrated the importance of letting individuals make choices about what they will do, when they will do it, and what they will earn. "Giving Choices" can be tricky. When asked if we would work longer to get something great or work just a bit and get a smaller reward, most of us will opt for the smaller reward now. But a simple hack for teaching kids to delay gratification is to offer a single reward when they opt to work for shorter periods and a rich platter of rewards to select from when choosing to work longer. This is important, because if kids opt to work longer for the platter of rewards, it leaves you more time to do things you need to do.

### **Building Connections to Make Everyone a Hero**

We've all heard the benefits of having family meals, but sometimes getting kids to the table is tough. Sitting still at mealtime can be challenging for many children. An exercise called "Jumble Jar" provides structure to mealtime and a simple way for members to connect with each other. Fill a jar with sentence starters or "jumbles" to take turns removing and discussing during meals. Instruct everyone to use superhero listening skills, (e.g., "I hear you saying that you dream of snorkeling to see colorful ocean creatures") and use their superpowers to expand on shorter answers that they offer. Here are a few examples:

- "Write two things you thought about doing that you can wait on & do some other time"
- "When I'm really down, my feelings are as big as a \_\_\_ and as heavy as a \_\_\_."
- "Something I used to be scared of but now I like is \_\_\_\_\_"
- "When I'm all alone, I pretend I'm a \_\_\_ because then I can do this \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I dream of doing this with my friends \_\_\_\_\_"
- "So that I can someday do something really great, right now, I practice this \_\_\_\_\_"

Another strategy that has strong scientific support is to begin the day with a "Vision Statement." Begin your day together by reciting a written statement of your family vision and constructing a list of activities *for the day* – consistent with this vision. Combine this with the creation of sight schedules, as described earlier. The vision statement should express your position on how to face challenges, increase connectedness, and reduce unsafe behaviors (e.g., "Our family steps up when things get tough and we do our part to safely help others").

### **What to Do When Tempers Flare**

You may be doing all the things we've outlined above and then, seemingly out of the blue, you lose it. Or your kid leaves for the park unchaperoned. Here are some strategies to help in these scenarios.

“Stop, Redirect, Praise” is an evidence-based practice that works because it informs someone acting out what they must cease doing and what they should begin doing, plus it offers encouragement for following through with the expectation. For example, when Marilyn is hitting her brother, use a firm voice to say, “Marilyn, stop hitting. Cross your arms and sit down.” As soon as she begins to follow through with your instruction, say, “Thank you; I appreciate it when you calm yourself down.”

But what if it's you that is getting agitated?

This is where you are called upon to show *your* superpowers. Living in cramped quarters for prolonged durations is likely to increase the frequency of verbal conflicts between adults. Children observe and do as the adults do, so we should not be surprised when they squabble as we do. But a strong body of evidence shows that *just pausing* for just a few short minutes when agitated can lead to more productive dialogue. “Pausing When Agitated” like this facilitates a shift from trying to change each other to changing how we respond to disagreements. Conflicts are not bad; they are the inevitable outgrowth of being different. Managing conflicts with warmth shows our heroic commitment to walking through these hard times together. If you can model this one thing for your children, you will have imbued them with a skill that will benefit them, their future life partners, and their children.

Over the course of many years, our work has shown that cooperation is truly the cornerstone of heroism. Let's use our superpowers to bring cooperation and kindness into our homes.