

Parenting Through the Coronavirus Crisis - FAQs

The lengthy stay at home with the kids raises many questions for all of us. From daily routines to setting limits, educational principles, behavioral issues, alone time, stress and more. The "Ech Gadalta" (How You've Grown) experts are here to help you make sense of it all.



1. What can help us get through the long days at home?

We're living in times of uncertainty and constant changes to our routine and habits. This is why trying to create certainty and routine amidst the chaos allows us to restore a certain sense of control to ourselves and our children. It's important to create a routine with healthy habits that will also provide a sense of security. Try to create a daily routine that's right for your family, and that includes wake up times, bedtimes, and other anchors throughout the day, like eating as a family or doing activities together. Set a quiet time during the day that will allow you to gather your strength. During this time, the kids can read, build a puzzle, watch a movie, or do any other quiet activity. You're building a new routine now. This can take some time and you should expect to work it out through trial and error. Take a few minutes at the end of the day to sum up what happened. Think about what worked well and what didn't, and learn from your successes for the more challenging situations.

2. What should I say when the kids keep repeating the words "I'm bored"?

First of all, take a deep breath. It's okay for the kids to be bored. It develops their imagination, creativity and resourcefulness. After you've taken a deep breath, you can suggest different activities. You can also try asking them a few questions to try and understand what they meant by being bored. Do they want "screen time"? Maybe they are actually asking for your attention and time to do something together. Maybe they're doing something that's frustrating them. Planning the day together with the kids can help avoid "bored" situations. Also, it will help if you have an "I'm bored jar": a collection of ideas to do that you can choose or randomly select each time "I'm bored" arises.

3. How should I explain to kids, at different ages, why they can't meet up with their friends?

You can find a lot of videos and written materials, for any age, that explain what the corona virus is, that it's contagious and what we need to do to keep ourselves and the people around us safe.

Part of the explanation will of course include the fact that the virus is highly contagious and transfers easily between people, and this is why, for the near future, we need to stay at home with our family. Reassure your kids and make it clear to them that as long as we follow the rules, we'll stay healthy and safe. You should adjust your explanation according to your child's age, but it's important that in any explanation there be room to express emotions like sadness, longing and frustration, as well as this being a very confusing and unpleasant experience. During the explanation you should also ask your child who they would like to visit, what they'd like to do with them and think about ways to contact that person even with the physical distance. It's important to emphasize to the children, especially the young ones, that nobody is meeting their friends right now, and that even if you can't meet your friends you can still keep in touch with them. Writing letters\messages\drawings\emails and video calls are all ways to pass the time during isolation or lockdown. They can also play virtual games with friends.

4. What should I do about fights between siblings?

The lengthy stay at home is definitely a possible source for fights and friction and we don't have too many options other than to accept the fact that this is part of life. Try noticing: are there times of the day when they fight more? Can you recognize situations that cause fights? Is there something about these situations that can be avoided or reduced? Pay attention to the way you respond to the children's fights - what thoughts and feelings do you have, what's your automatic response (try separating them? solving their problem?). Once or twice, try choosing a response that's different than your usual one (for example, ignoring) and check what effect your choice had.

If you think it's fitting, have a conversation with the kids, ask them about the situations that make them fight more, how does this affect them and how the fights can be reduced. Planning a schedule ahead, taking turns on the computer\iPad, separating them so that they're in different parts of the house, can help. Also, this could be a good chance for the kids to learn emotional regulation strategies, and think about whether they can respond differently to an annoying sibling? Sometimes it's easier for a child to think for their sibling and offer ideas for how the other person can behave differently or how to help their sibling to calm down.

5. How can we create a daily schedule and how should we explain to the kids why this is important?

Have a conversation with the kids and together prepare a list of things they'd like to do throughout the day and week, including tasks they need to complete (around the house or for school). Let the kids think about a task they'd like to do, something new they'd like to learn, prepare something etc.

Build a daily schedule for each child and together with them, place the different components, alternating between fun activities (arts and crafts, sports, a game or screen time), tasks and homework. Don't forget to leave time for fun meal preparation and meals.

In families with children with different needs and ages, make sure to create a schedule that allows you to be with the younger children who need your attention when the older kids can get along on their own.

Set shared times for the entire family: meals, shared activities (a movie, exercise, family games, cooking night, karaoke night etc.).

6. How can I create a sense of security and a safe space for the older kids and teenagers who are exposed to the news?

It's important to remember - even if you think the kids are busy playing their own games and not watching the news, the moment the TV, radio or any other media source, is on in the house, the kids (at any age) are also exposed to it. This is why it's important to create opportunities to talk. Try to find a quiet time without distractions, ask what they're watching or listening to, what they think about what's going on, what they understand, what they'd like to know, and how it all makes them feel. You can also share your feelings with them and tell them that everyone's experiencing feelings of fear and uncertainty. With kids and teenagers, it's important to explain the difference between facts and rumors, speculations and fake news, and to help them tell them apart and focus on the facts and the guidelines.

It's important to reduce the news consumption (for you too). You don't have to be updated about every new person who's infected and what's happening in every country. Try focusing your attention on good news as well (for example, countries that are dealing with the coronavirus successfully, containment of the virus, mutual aid and support). You can even turn looking for good news into an activity or a job for the older kids. Encourage the kids to talk to you if they're exposed to something stressful or unsettling.

7. How can I get everyone to stop snacking all day?

Being at home and bored can cause a greater interest in food, more than usual. Place healthy snacks that are ready to eat in convenient places: sliced fruit and vegetables, yogurt, rice cakes etc. You can also prepare a basket for each child with the "snacks" that are supposed to last the whole day. You can 'brand' and decorate the snack corner together, and encourage the kids to come up with ideas for healthy snacks for the next few days, and even make them together.

8. How can I get the children involved in tasks around the house?

Make the tasks part of a game. You can build a boardgame where for every task you can move forward a certain number of moves, or set a "price tag" for each task so that for every task performed, the kids get "vouchers" for a fun activity or a treat (movie night, pushing bedtime off by an hour, choosing the menu for family dinner, etc.). You can also build a family task board where you'll try to place the kids according to their requests, so that to the extent possible they'll all have a chance to choose. Difficult tasks or tasks that nobody likes will be divided among the kids throughout the week.

9. How can we, the parents, find quiet time for ourselves?

Write down activities that will make you happy and give you energy. Having a cup of coffee while having a quiet conversation with your friend\partner (even if it's virtual...), reading a book, listening to music, yoga, or just resting. In the schedule, set quiet times during the day, when the kids don't need you as much while they're doing something quiet on their own (reading, puzzles, a movie etc.). Also, you can build a schedule for both you and your partner so that you each have some quiet time every day when you're not in charge. Don't use this time to 'get something done', but to breathe and relax. This time will recharge your energy.

10. How can parents keep a healthy life style during lockdown or isolation?

It's important to keep a healthy life style, even when you're in isolation or lockdown. Pay attention to waking up times and bedtimes and try not to deviate from the schedule. Spend time exercising every day. You can find a variety of programs for a variety of activities online - personal or in a group, recorded programs or live, and choose an activity for yourself that you'll enjoy. It's important to set a time for exercise, and you can set a time with another family member to exercise together. If you have a hard time finding an activity that you enjoy, try attaching the exercise to another fun activity - for example, working out while watching a TV program that you like or giving yourself a "prize" after you're done exercising (but... maybe not chocolate...).

Make sure not to spend your day sitting or lying down. Try reading a book while standing or moving your legs, talking on the phone while walking, or working on the computer while standing.

Eat regular meals, instead of snacking all day. Prepare a supply of cut-up fruit and vegetables, and make sure to drink a lot of water throughout the day.

11. How can parents balance work and staying at home with the kids?

It takes time to get used to a routine that includes working from home with the kids. Patience is key. To the extent that it's possible, try to plan times when you can work and make sure to have the proper conditions for this. During this time, try concentrating on work and being efficient, and the rest of the time, don't try to work. If the children's age is appropriate for this, you can try explaining to them that you need a certain amount of time without being disturbed, and that you'll be with them after that. Try using the time that the kids are busy or asleep to work, but don't forget to also give yourselves time to rest.

12. How can we deal with stress and anxiety without "taking it out on the kids"?

There are a lot of techniques to deal with stress and anxiety that include breathing, relaxation, guided imagery and more. First of all, it's important to recognize what situations cause the anxiety and stress to "boil over" onto the kids. After you've identified the situations that "trigger" you, try practicing other responses. Keep in mind that you won't always manage to avoid expressing frustration or anger. Remember that every time you do manage to avoid this, it is a small success. Be proud of yourselves, and be forgiving and compassionate towards yourselves and the people around you.

13. Feelings of guilt - what can we do about them?

Feelings of guilt are an inseparable part of parenthood. Sometimes we even learn to live with them, but sometimes they rise up, especially when seeing WhatsApp messages full of activities or social media images filled with familial harmony. Try discussing these feelings with your partner or friends that you can share parenting difficulties with. Ask yourselves: would every parent handle these situations better than you? Are all the kids whose parents are in the same situation dealing with things better? If you look around, you'll realize that you're probably just as good as your friends, that most of us deal with similar thoughts and that we all make mistakes. Remember, the goal isn't to always be the best, but to be good enough. Do the best you can in that moment and accept the fact that none of us are perfect parents.

14. Where can I get more information and ideas?

On "Ech Gadalta" (How You've Grown) of course 😊

An entire portal of knowledge-based information, in Hebrew and in Arabic, waiting just for you. Come on!

If the answer to your question is not here, send us an email so we can continue to update: info@goshen.org.il