

## **SUPPORTING OUR KIDS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC WITH CONNECTION AND COLLECTIVE CARE**

**Sarina Behar Natkin, LICSW**

**June 10, 2020**

### **TWO GIFTS OF THIS TIME: GREATER RESILIENCE & INCREASED CONNECTION**

- Facing uncertainty & sitting with discomfort gives our kids practice in facing challenges.
- Parents can teach and model how to stay flexible and persevere through difficulty.
- The pace of life has slowed for many, providing an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with our children and help us come out of this stronger as a family.

### **THREE TOOLS TO HELP US FIND THE GIFTS**

#### **Working with The Brain**

- Chronic stress has an impact on our bodies and brains. We may find ourselves in fight or flight more frequently, with decreased concentration, more easily distracted, anxious, depressed or not able to function as we have during less stressful times.
- By taking time to regulate every 30-45 minutes throughout the day, we can lessen the negative effects of stress, and be more available to our children.
- Exercise, deep breaths, stepping outdoors, a hug, playing a game, and meditating are all ways to regulate. Regulation is important for our children too, so we need to model it.

#### **Using Structure & Routine**

- Routines are particularly helpful right now because knowing what to expect helps reduce the mental load on our already stressed brains.
- The most important routines to tend to include: sleep, meals, physical activity, and social connection. Make sure these are in place to help us navigate this time and ensure our children are getting what they need to stay healthy.
- The more we involve kids in creating routines, the more likely they will be to follow them. With teens, we can act as the consultant instead of the boss and help them reflect on what is routine for them and what areas may need additional focus.

#### **Making Meaning**

- Making meaning of this time can help to minimize the long-term impact. We can help our kids make meaning by: doing good for others, even in tiny ways such as calling a grandparent to check in; by increasing responsibility in the home giving them a sense that they have a role that matters; and, by giving choice and freedom where possible to help them feel empowered in their lives.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

#### **Summer Structure**

- Instead of staring at twelve weeks with no plans, we can help our brain move out of panic and in to planning by breaking summer down into smaller chunks.



Sarina Behar Natkin, LICSW

[www.sarinanatkin.com](http://www.sarinanatkin.com)

- Try planning the first 2-4 weeks and see how it's going. This gives us flexibility as we move along and the ability to be out in the world increases. Or break the day in to thirds, 1/3 free time, 1/3 online or structured class or activity, 1/3 time with parent or caregiver.
- Involving your child or teen in creating a plan will get more buy in and build life skills around time management and planning.
- Start by brainstorming the goals for summer – fun, connection, independence, work time for parents – whatever pieces are meaningful to your family. Then figure out the critical pieces: who needs to work and when, care for little ones, meals, sleep, active time, chores, and connection time. Next, brainstorm what to do with the rest of the time, or those thirds of the day if using that model.

### **Navigating Re-entry**

- As we re-enter physical proximity with people outside our household, we need to make clear agreements with our kids around exposure based on family member risk level.
- Focusing on safety as a guiding value can help us navigate this time with greater trust. We can then hear the needs of our older kids and plan with them on how to keep safe.
- If we focus on rules and rule following, we may invite sneaking, which can put us all at greater risk. If our kids can come to us, knowing we are willing to listen, we are all safer.
- We can demand compliance, but what really matters is self-discipline – choosing to do the right thing when no one is watching. For the non-negotiable boundaries, we can hold these with kindness and firmness at the same time, without shame or blame. That way our kids maintain dignity and are more likely to do better next time.

### **Supporting Ourselves as Parents**

- These are hard times. We are going to lose it and so are our children. Mistakes are going to happen. Self-compassion allows us to more easily recover from mistakes and try again.
- If we can allow ourselves to not be perfect parents and accept that this time is different, we can let go of the idea that we should be able to manage the same way we did before, and adapt to new ways of being.

### **Remembering Our Most Effective Parenting Tool**

- As our children grow, our job is to slowly release them to their own autonomy.
- Hold on too tight and we may not give them enough space to make mistakes while they are still at home with us. Give too much freedom, and they may not know how to handle it.
- By walking with them through this challenging time, trusting them, showing compassion for their mistakes, and letting them try again, we send the message that what matters most is the connection between us.
- Your most powerful parenting tool as your child grows is in your relationship with them. When they are teens, it's the trust and connection that allows us to have influence.
- We can take this time as an opportunity to build that connection in deeper ways.



## RESOURCES

Dr. Dan Siegel Brain in Hand Model- <https://youtu.be/gm9CIJ74Oxw>

(Demonstrates what happens when we experience big emotions- adults and kids alike)

Talking to kids about racism, social justice, anti-racist book lists- <https://www.embracerace.org/>

Online Classes, Camps, Learning Ideas- <https://bit.ly/2Mlgyvr>

Community & Family Resource List- <https://bit.ly/2BB04mn>

Seattle Public Schools Health Services and Resource Page- <https://bit.ly/2AC8sSf>

National Association of School Psychologists Helping Kids Cope- <https://bit.ly/2Y8V00i>

(Note sidebar for information in multiple languages)



Sarina Behar Natkin, LICSW

[www.sarinanatkin.com](http://www.sarinanatkin.com)