

Promoting the healthy development of children during the COVID-19 pandemic

Parenting during the pandemic can get a little overwhelming and confusing. During these times, it may be helpful to shine a light on some practices that parents can adopt to help themselves and their children navigate this crisis together. These include:



Physical health

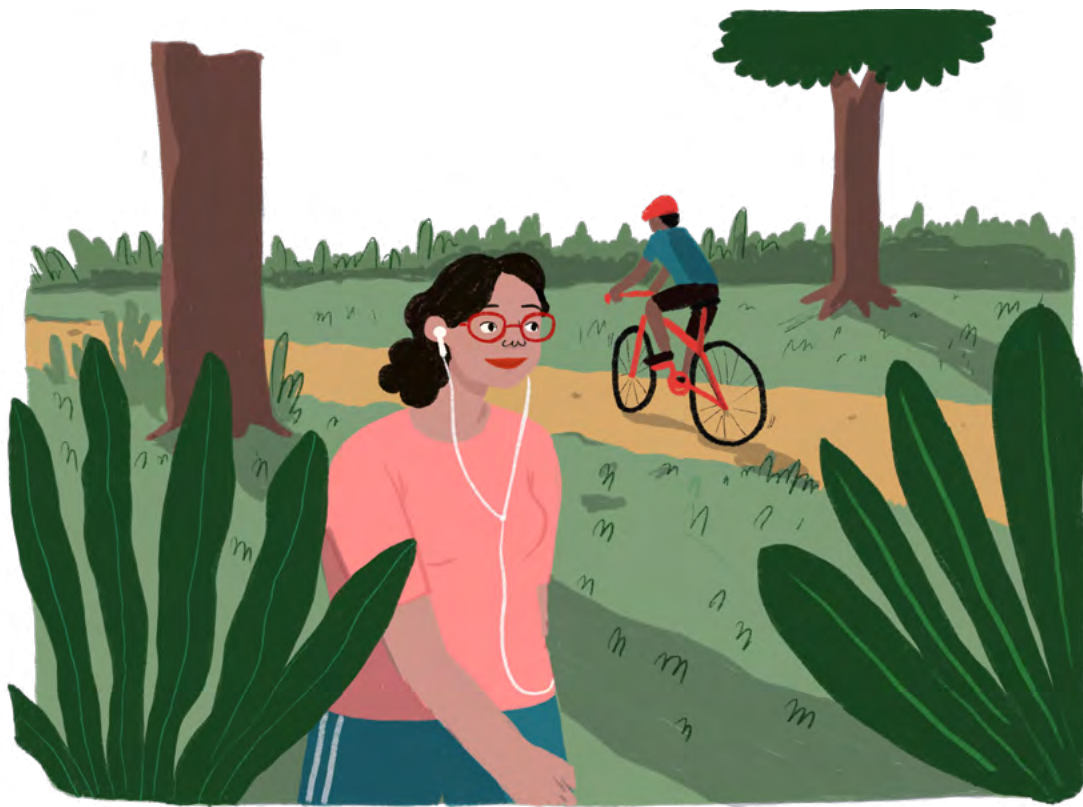
Mental and physical health go hand in hand and both are of utmost importance in childhood. Parents should make sure that:

- Your child's diet is healthy, adequate and nutritious
- Children engage in some form of physical activity daily.
- Children breathe in the fresh air and are exposed to the sunlight.
- Children get a night of restful sleep for the recommended duration (generally, children from 1 to 12 years should get 9-14 hours of sleep while adolescents from 13 to 18 years require 8-10 hours of sleep).

Education

The changes in routine, not being able to meet peers and the difficulties of learning online can be challenging for children. The transition to and from online schooling can be anxiety-provoking for some families.

- Ensure that children receive formal education according to their age and abilities.
- Talk to children often, using robust vocabulary, reading stories with them, providing them with labels for things (objects, relationships, phenomenon, numbers, letters, etc.), answering "what", "why", "where" questions.
- Use activities at home to further enrich their learning. For instance, weaving the concepts learnt in class into stories, measuring ingredients while cooking, gardening, etc.
- Encourage your child to take up fun stimulating hobbies like arts and crafts, colouring, painting, jigsaws, brain games, etc.
- Ensure children take breaks (especially ones that don't involve screen time) between classes or other structured activities.
- Help the child to maintain a normal routine, have regular bedtimes, mealtimes, playtimes, reading times, homework times, etc, and help them stay connected to friends and family via phone and video chats. U This can also be done in collaboration with children, especially teenagers.



Social engagement

The pandemic has disrupted traditional means of socializing and parents should:

- **Ensure that children interact with other children** their age. This can be done through video calls and spending time virtually with their friends.
- **Set aside time to spend it with children.** It could be 20 minutes or an hour. Ask them what they want to do during that time (like reading, playing an offline game, talking about their favourite cartoon, game etc.)
- The **use of support, empathy and understanding outweighs the use of punishment** and authoritarian means of parenting. Therefore, punitive measures should be used with caution. Praise and reward positive behaviours by using clear and positive statements.
- **Avoid using physical punishment** as this model's violent behaviour and shouting makes children more stressed.
- **Do not use abusive language** when communicating with children directly or communicating with others around them.
- Children will look to adults for cues on how to behave. **Try to model healthy covid appropriate behaviours** like social distancing, hand washing, putting on a mask, etc.
- **Ensure that children's concerns are heard** and their feelings validated. Children may want to talk about their fears or their frustrations, etc. Create a space that invites such sharing.



Technology

We are all spending more time in a virtual world and so are our children. How can your child have a healthy relationship with technology?

- Set limits to the use of technology and social media. This may be done by “technology free bedtime” where no gadgets should be around once children are in bed. Other gadget-free zones could be the dining table, while outdoors, etc.
- Specific time should be allotted for “screen time” during which children can play video games, watch television, etc. This can also be done in consultation with the children.
- It may also be useful to inform the kids about protective internet behaviours and precautions they must take like:
 1. Never share a password with anyone
 2. Never share personal details like address, number of people in the house, etc.
 3. Never share things (e.g. pictures) that they are not comfortable with
 4. Never accept an unknown friend or follow requests
 5. It’s okay to unfriend and block people that make them uncomfortable
 6. If you feel uncomfortable online, it’s okay to speak to a trusted adult who can guide you in this situation.

Explaining and acknowledging the pandemic

If your child is of the appropriate age, they are likely to have questions regarding the pandemic, new behaviours like not going outside, not playing with other children, virtual school, wearing a mask, etc. It is essential to inform the children about why they now have to do all these things and answer the questions they might have. This information should be age-appropriate and simple. This can be done by using comic guides, videos, animated illustrations, colouring sheets, etc. You can find an additional resource on our website that can help explain the pandemic and the coronavirus to your children easier.





If your child is relatively older, the inability to meet friends, go outside, cancellation of exams, death in the family may all be events that may lead to feelings of uncertainty, sadness, frustration and disappointments. Parents can play an active role here by modelling ways to deal with such stressors in a proactive manner with a focus on finding alternatives and using adaptive coping strategies. Since constant exposure to COVID-19 related news can be distressing, it may be helpful to set a time during which your child or adolescent consumes information related to coronavirus (e.g. on television, social media, newspaper, etc.). This mindful element is essential to ensure that children are well informed without being taxed by the morbid and misinformed COVID-19 content that is out there.

Visits to the doctor

Children's physical and mental health may be affected- especially considering their regular visits to the doctor may be impacted. It is important to prioritize your child's physical well being and consult the relevant physician if you feel concerned. Reassuring children about their safety and well being, and teaching them the basic steps to be healthy is important at this time. In addition to your children's physical well-being, at this time it is important to be sensitive to their mental health needs as well. You can find more information about the same in our handout "Dealing with common mental health issues for children of different age groups".

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