

# MANAGING THE CORONA-COASTER

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## STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES IN LOCKDOWN

SUMMARY OF WEBINAR

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# THE CHALLENGE:

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Navigating the reality of remote school work, lots of family time and a ton of uncertainty about what happens next is enormously challenging for most people. For families not used to this much together time, irritability and tempers may flare. Setting and enforcing rules for calm, respectful interactions in your home promotes critical stability and mental health in your kids.

Show empathy for how your kids' lives are changing by listening to their experiences and giving them space to express how they feel. .

# KEY MESSAGES:

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- Set the emotional tone – parents should be purveyors of hope. We are taking the coronavirus seriously but convey that we are not panicking.
- This is all very inconvenient but our grandparents faced worse.
- Politicians and health experts are doing their best to flatten the curve, while also supporting families and businesses.
- If we keep doing the right thing, we may return to normality sooner.

# WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

- Remember the Big 7 Wellbeing factors: Diet, Exercise, Sleep, Technology detox, Friends, Structure the Day, Plan for the future.
- Plan your days together and keep routines and rituals going. Build in exercise, a meal together and regular breaks from work and study into your plan.
- Check in regularly to see how the kids are doing. If you can sense that things aren't going o.k., intervening early is important. When the situation or relationships reach a certain level of stress, it can be much harder to decompress.
- Go for a walk together – Getting outside of the house together is a good way to get active, as well as connect with them, or just being together.
- Help them keep in touch with their friends. Facilitate or help them to organise, closed social media groups for those people teenagers are closest to.
- Stay calm when talking about COVID-19 – Explain the dangers of COVID-19 calmly and without sensationalising it. Remind them that there are trustworthy news sources and not to spend too much time researching.
- Help them to focus on the things they can control and be aware of the things they can't. Accept that we can't control everything. Focus on the important issues and try and manage those.
- Give them space. Make sure your child gets some confidential private space when they're at home, as well as time away from siblings or elderly family members.
- As lock down relaxes, renegotiate young people's options for leaving the house. Give them agreed and safe levels of freedom. Reward them for complying to the rules – Small fun treats, some recognition or start a little fund of money saved to do something fun

# WHAT PARENTS CAN DO (CONT):

- Have something to look forward to – Plan something big, like a party, celebration, day out or weekend away at the end of all of this.
- Agree to a set of age-appropriate jobs for each family member but try not to be overly rigid with them. While everyone has their jobs within the family, try not to be too strict with younger siblings, for example. And if they do agree to help out, acknowledge and reward their efforts.
- Have fun. Make time to do fun things as a family, whatever that looks like for you.
- It's worth repeating: try and stick to some kind of routine. Trying to maintain a normal sleep, food, exercise, school work, free time and family time routine will help things not feel so chaotic. Healthy eating and sleeping routines are really important for overall physical and mental health.
- Increase your child's trusted circle – Meaning, make sure they still have contact with extended family or other important people in their lives. Think about who your child goes to with their issues and problems. This is someone who cares about your child's safety, who offers good practical advice, who recognises how hard it is and who can help them think about some good solutions.
- Make sure they know support lines they can use to talk to someone if they ever wanted to. Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800.
- Help them develop different coping strategies – home exercise, cooking, relaxation techniques. Talk to them about the things they find relaxing and encourage them to take part in them.
- Keep connected – Catching up and staying connected with friend apps such as Houseparty, Facetime, Zoom and online interactive games can be great, but also make sure to talk to kids about their safety online. Let them know that they can talk to you if they are worried about anything online.

# RESILIENCE

Kauai is the 4th largest island in the Hawaiian chain and was the setting for the 1993 movie Jurassic Park where terrifyingly realistic dinosaurs ran amok trying to chow down on Sam Neil and Laura Dern. More importantly, it was the setting for one of the most important studies in the field of child psychology – with findings highly relevant to parents in the coronavirus era.

In 1955, Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith began a longitudinal study of 698 children born on the island during that year. They selected that island because at the time, there were high levels of unemployment, drug and alcohol use and mental illness amongst the adults and they wanted to see what happened to children growing up in circumstances of pervasive adversity.

Following up the children for 40 years, the investigators' landmark finding, was that while two thirds of the sample crashed and burnt, one third of the cohort displayed extraordinary resilience and developed into caring, competent and confident adults, despite their environment.

The ones that made it, had access to mitigating elements known as protective factors, which helped to balance out risk factors at critical times in their development. Among these factors were a strong bond with a charismatic adult, good social skills, positive self talk and involvement in a church or community group like the YMCA.

The study reinforces the fact that kids do best when they have someone in their lives who will make them feel safe, valued and listened to, have a sense of connection, meaning, purpose and belonging and are adept at conflict resolution, anger management and problem solving. Our job is to prepare our young people for an uncertain future and Werner and Smith offer us all a much-needed template to follow, so that our kids do not end up like the brachiosaurs and dilophosaurs, of Jurassic Park.

# DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES:

•The Department's [education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au) has information and advice regarding learning from home, how to talk to your child about coronavirus, bullying prevention, looking after yourself and your child's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

FUSE, <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au> – the Department's online learning hub has activities and tips that will help your family to keep healthy and active as well as links to further resources and ideas for getting through lockdown

# OTHER RESOURCES:

Schooltv – <https://schooltv.me>

Building Resilience in Children 0-12 – A Practice guide for professionals – <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/children/building-resilience-in-children-aged-0-12>

Smiling Mind – <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>