

Psychological advice for parents who stay at home with the kids because of the new virus



Dear parents,

The facts that stroke these days are about a situation that is very new to every one of us. Things moved on really quickly and we were called to adapt to demanding circumstances- us and our children, as well. As a psychologist and a mum I'd like to share some thoughts and suggestions about having a better quality of life during these strange days:

- Newsfeed: we try not to expose our kids all the time to news and relevant shows, as they are often telling a news story using sensationalism (seeking attention by creating an emotional impact, usually negative) that creates stress to adults and children.
- Changes in behavior: children are very fond of their routine, as it creates a sense of stability and security for them. It makes sense that the new situation upsets them, which can become obvious in sometimes irrelevant ways, as tantrums, changes in eating and sleeping patterns and habits, increased sensitivity, attachment, outbursts of anger, rudeness or sadness.

- Empathy: we try to see the world and the situation from their eyes and not from our adult “shoes”.
- Boundaries: it is important to keep the boundaries, but let's not forget that we are dealing with a crisis, which means that we can't expect the same rules and boundaries to be kept. Better understanding and flexibility are needed.
- Parental attitude: kids at these times need a calm, stable, cool, optimistic and supportive parent. Not one who is stressed, judgemental or who complains about their presence all the time.
- We try to withhold comments (even when they are humorous) about how awful or difficult it is to stay at home with the kids, because it is not fair to present this as a chore. Instead, use phrases like “family time”, “we are a team”, “we try to cooperate”, “we are spending time with our little ones”.
- We speak in a positive manner about our home, instead of talking about how suffocating it may be to stay home. We make some reference discretely to the other activities that kids participated in before the outbreak, in order to give a sense of continuity and optimism, trying at the same time not to cause too much nostalgia.
- We refer to the virus as one that is not dangerous for the young people, but for the elderly, and that the young must protect as a giant shield the elderly and the sensitive people. We emphasize collaboration, team work and belongingness.
- We emphasize that all this will end soon and that life will get back to normal.
- We refer to the schools closing and staying at home as something that we had to do for safety and protection and not as a fun break.
- We try to cooperate and to communicate our needs calmly.
- We give a sense of routine during the day, like e.g. study time, movie time, reading time, the new word of the day and we try to keep a sleep and eating schedule as much as possible.
- We make sure to take care of our bodies as much as possible, eating well, getting enough sleep, doing some form of exercise (e.g. youtube videos) to maintain our physical and mental health. We try to avoid keeping children busy with unnecessary snacks or emotional eating (out of stress, boredom etc.)

Finally, let's be realistic: a) we are not professionals at keeping children amused and busy- even if we were, it's not possible to get ourselves into marathons of providing quality time to them. There will be mistakes, difficult times and empty days. We need to be inventive but at a rational level. b) we need to emphasise our self-care, so that we are also strong as parents during all this. Self-care practices include reading a book, having a relaxing bath or long shower, enjoying a relaxing meal, meditation or prayer, exercise, communicating with loved ones who make us feel well, staying away from screens and limiting newsfeed, drinking relaxing herbal tea, laughter (the best and most easily available antistress medicine!), altruistic acts (they help us feel useful and self-satisfied), taking care of our body, creative hobbies, deep breathing...

In a while all this will belong to the past and we will be able to get gradually back to our lives sort of as we left them- but we can allow what happened to teach us a lot and to get out of it wiser and of course closer to each other.

I wish everyone strength, cooperation, empathy, understanding, keeping calm, optimism, luck and of course...health!

Kind regards,
Kalliope Emmanouilidou,
Psychologist- author