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K-6+ Learning Kit



How to Get Through a Bad Day with Your Child Parenting in a Pandemic

From Happiness Custom Made Interactive Workshops
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Please start with giving yourself and each other credit for making huge life adjustments in the face of the worldwide challenge of dealing with the Coronavirus invasion. You have to show up each day with your best efforts to make the day productive and positive for your loved ones and for yourself. I hope this booklet of ideas helps.

I have developed my Happiness Custom Made workshops to be given in person, with the benefit of the shared wisdom of participants. I have tried to duplicate the main points in this written format and hope the information is useful to you.

Though we do not have the benefit of meeting together at this time, I trust that our mutual goals are to support children to be joyful, curious, energetic problem-solvers. I hope to be able to come to your communities and meet each of you in the future!

My mission is to take the research on child development and the Science of Happiness and turn the findings into guided action steps. I identify realistic and high impact targets for change, so that your energy is used wisely.

You know that your role as parent, guardian, aunt/uncle or grandparent is meaningful! We watch the good days sail by smoothly, but the bad days call on us to be equipped to help. Enclosed are suggestions for creating a structure of support within the family, to be strong and sustaining through the current situation.

“If you want to go fast, go alone.

If you want to go far, go together”

African proverb

**May you be safe and healthy,
Dr. Carmody**

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How To Have a Good Morning

The mornings are starting differently without the school bells leading the way. Children may be able to wake up on their own schedule and that can have its benefits. However, structure helps children to feel grounded in a familiar day, so a morning routine is helpful.

Here are some suggestions for lifting the family mood in the morning:

- 1) Start the day with feel-good music playing quietly in the kitchen as family members wander in to get some breakfast. If anyone hums or sings or sways along, all the better! Music can often set the stage for a good mood.
- 2) Try to include some protein in the breakfast selection of food choices. Eggs or milk add that easily. Protein digests slowly and keeps energy and blood sugar at a steady level.
- 3) Have everyone make their beds! There's an old adage that states: "The state of your bed is the state of your head." Research shows that making the bed correlates with higher productivity for the whole day. It also has the benefit of being a barrier to getting back into bed. It only takes about 90 seconds and seems to give a sense of organization to the day. Good payoff for that little bit of time!

How to Have a Good Morning

4) Help the children make a schedule of their own “To Dos” for the morning. Set alarms or reminders to guide them to stay on schedule. Of course, they will need more or less assistance depending on age and concentration skills.

5) The schedule should include activity breaks or active, outside chores. If nothing else, a brisk walk for 15 minutes clears the mind and improves mood. 6)

Since we are all at home together in this unusual, and for many, stressful situation, it is vital to remember the good in each other. Each morning write a little thank you note to each child and encourage each child to write at least one note to someone in the household before lunchtime. These little notes of appreciation can be on a small piece of paper and can include a drawn picture, a cut-out picture, words or just a heart. They are “love notes” and should be placed where the recipient will find them at some point in the day. The delight of being kindly remembered will feel like a gift!

The One-Minute Stress Buster

If you only use one of the parenting strategies, make it this one! A careful shift in breathing can de-stress the body in exactly one minute and the mind will follow. It's easy and impressive!

Whenever we, as human beings, feel threatened or distressed, the body prepares for life-saving ACTION. We call this the Fight or Flight response and everyone's body gears up in similar ways. We breathe into the top part of our lungs, so that oxygen is readily available to muscles. Muscles, in turn, become tense and prepared to save us by running from danger or by fighting the foe. Heart rate, blood pressure and adrenalin all elevate. We should thank the body for its ready response when this is needed. However, when the situation calls for a different response, we need to use a strategy to release this tension, relax and allow our brain to think through other responses. The key to this switch is the breath, which we control.

Switch Gears

- 1) When your children seem tense, frustrated or angry help them switch gears out of Fight or Flight into a state of Rest. You will have to guide this, which is good for you as well!
- 2) Start by saying, "Let's spend a minute together relaxing." It is completely unhelpful to say, "Calm down" in an irritated voice. That makes the other person angry 100% of the time.

The One-Minute Stress Buster

3) Sit down together or your child can lie down on the floor or a bed (this is best). Take 3 big, slow shoulder rolls in both directions. Release tension in the neck by putting the right ear toward the right shoulder, then slowly roll the head forward so the chin is near the chest, moving smoothly to position the left ear by the left shoulder. Then slowly move the head forward again and over to the right. Repeat that neck roll 3 times.

4) Now let the magic begin: slowly inhale so the lungs fully inflate. In particular, feel air going to the lower portion of the lung so that the lower abdomen and ribs move out. That low, slow inhale should last for 4 seconds...count out loud. Relax the breath in a steady exhale, also for 4 seconds.

5) Repeat for 1 minute. That's it! The body has felt about 10 full breaths, which lets the mind know, with ancient wisdom, that there is no immediate danger. If we can breathe fully, we are FINE for right now.

6) Sometimes children are helped to accomplish a full breath by saying to "breathe in the flowers, blow out the candles" or "blow out through pursed lips like you are blowing up a balloon". If you have access to YouTube, there are many demonstrations of this form of relaxation breathing, often called diaphragmatic breathing. It can be interesting to watch how others practice it.

10 Minutes on the Couch

This was designed to be used when the family got back together after a day of school and work. Now you are all often together all day, so you have to create the time to pause the chaos and sit down together. Perhaps doing this after lunch makes sense, or right before starting to make dinner. The goal is to have a few uninterrupted minutes for relaxed conversation. It builds children's communication skills, which is so important as they try to get their needs met.

Tips for Together for Ten

- 1) Have a simple snack to be shared, such as some carrots. Kids are drawn to a bowl of anything! Make yourself a cup of tea. Sit on the couch or on the floor in the most comfortable gathering room.
- 2) Turn off all electronic distractions. No TV, no video games and, most importantly, make it a **NO PHONE ZONE!!** You can all make it for 10 minutes without these ever-present interruptions.
- 3) Start with a check in on each person gathered, including yourself. A few starter questions are listed below. This is **NOT** the time to discuss homework or behavior problems or any other problem. This is a **BREAK** from problems.

10 Minutes on the Couch

- 4) Listen attentively. Make eye contact with each child. Show interest in every person's words.
- 5) When your tea is gone or 10 minutes has passed, simply say, "that was nice" and move on with your day.

"Watch carefully,
the magic that occurs,
when you give a
person, just enough
comfort to be
themselves." Atticus

Suggested conversation starters:

- What pleasant surprise did you notice today?
- What have you done so far today that made you feel proud? (remember, the day isn't over yet)
- What felt like a challenge today? Tell the story about it. (no need to fix the problem, just listen)
- Did you find the chance to give someone a compliment today? (either spoken or written)
- What new fact did you learn today?
- Did someone do something nice for you today? Or visa versa?
- Your response to all of these questions is, "Thank you for sharing this."

The Pasta Jar

The pasta jar is a strategy for rewarding children for getting along with each other. It's a visual measurement for cooperation.

Here is the set up:

- 1) Find an unused container that is about the size of a large coffee can or a pot you might use to boil pasta. It's good if it's transparent, such as a jar, but it can also be a cooking pot or a box. Label it "The Good Vibe Jar" or "Pasta for Peace" or whatever creative name you would like.
- 2) Get a supply of dry pasta that you won't need for cooking or have the kids tear up paper into strips and crumple them. This material needs to be light weight. Styrofoam packing peanuts work well, but I am going to refer to this material as pasta.

The Rules

- 1) You, the parent, place a handful of pasta into the jar when you see the children playing well together or helping each other. You describe what you specifically noticed, such as, "I see that you all helped clean up our living room." "I noticed that you took turns with the bike today."
- 2) Do this two or three times a day, when examples of kindness, cooperation or patience between the children come to your attention. The jar should slowly fill, reaching the top in about 5 days.

The Pasta Jar

3) Here's the trick. You do NOT remove pasta for bad behavior, as tempting as that is! You only add to it for good behavior. If the family has a very difficult day, it's possible that no pasta gets added to the jar. That is enough of a message.

4) When the pasta reaches the top of the jar, the whole family gets a treat. That might be going somewhere special, like having a picnic, or having a favorite dessert or hot chocolate, or starting a new puzzle together. Be creative about enjoyable activities, which don't cost much money.

Remember that you might be doing these about once a week. 5) Empty the pasta jar and start again.

Sticking with this little game has a slow but sure way of highlighting positive behavior in a powerful way.

I like to say, "Take a lesson from our desert land: Water the flowers, not the weeds, because what you water, grows."

Put a Bandage on Hurt Feelings

Here are some ways you can help children turn away from teasing, taunting, and troublesome comments. As parents, you have the chance to soothe the unkind words of others by describing a strategy for seeing a different truth.

1) Words are sound waves, pure and simple. We instinctively know to ignore sound waves that don't have personal meaning, such as the annoying racket of a bus or a loud sound a motorcycle makes as it drives past us. A disruptive noise like this interrupts a phone conversation or a song we are listening to, but we know to just wait a minute and it will pass. We don't usually become upset. Our brain discards certain sounds and gives other meaning.

2) Have kids make a list of the noises they instinctively ignore. Appreciate that this truth gives each person a lot of power to discard mean-spirited comments by other children. Help them "Stop words at your ears! Don't let them into your mind. You are the boss of this."

Put a Bandage on Hurt Feelings

3) Teach your children that chosen words say something true about the speaker. Is that person nice, considerate, generous OR mean, rude, selfish? Is the speaker a true friend or not? Maybe that person is having a hard day and not able to be their best self at this point in time. For whatever reason, notice that the words reveal the speaker and NOT the receiver.

As the great poet and activist Maya Angelou wrote, “When someone shows you who they are, believe them.”

...but when someone tries to tell you who YOU are, do not believe them. Keep track of your own talents, goodness and dignity.

4) Help each child you know create a statement, in words or pictures, of the things he or she does well. Keep it posted! This strengthens realistic self-esteem, which is possibly the most important quality in successful life relationships.

Design Dinner Time for Family Connection

There is a ton of research finding about the importance of having a peaceful family dinner together. One of the most interesting is a 16year study done at the University of Michigan. It found that eating meals as a family improves children's language skills, manners, self-esteem and sense of security. In turn, the bond established with parents, grandparents and siblings has protective value in adolescent decisions about smoking, drinking and drug use. Some studies indicate that family meals have at least as much influence on child development as time spent in school!

- 1) The meal does not have to be fancy. A sandwich has just as much power as a complicated meal.
- 2) The meals do not have to occur every day for the positive value to have significant impact.
- 3) However, the TV and phones have to be OFF during dinnertime. The focus has to be on conversation with each other and collective experience of the family.
- 4) These gatherings are a great time to share family history, especially if members of the older generations are present to tell their stories.

Design Dinner Time for Family Connection

Here is a sample of good dinnertime conversation starters. One person chooses a question (or draws it out of a bowl). That person answers it. Next, go around the table with each person offering a different answer to the same question. After each response, everyone thanks that person for sharing his or her answer. No arguments, no debates! Do this once or twice a week with a different person choosing the question and providing the first answer.

- How do you think your parents chose your name?
- What is a treasured memory? What makes it so special?
- What positive personality traits do you share with other family members?
- Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want to invite as a dinner guest?
- Make three true “we” statements that include everyone at the table. For example, “We all have brown eyes, feel grateful for our meal, are worried about _____, are happy about _____, enjoy playing games, etc.”
- What do you feel grateful for in your current life?

Have a Consistent Bedtime Routine

It is so important for children to get enough sleep. The research shows that the time they go to bed is more important than the time they get up, which is good because parents can be in charge of lights out. Feeling well-rested can help children be optimistic problem solvers and can protect them from depression.

Tips to get them to bed on time:

- 1) Turn off all electronic screens at 8pm (even yours!), approximately one hour before bedtime. This is essential because the blue light on handheld screens disrupts the body's natural process of becoming drowsy.
- 2) Clean up (a soothing bath is best), brush teeth and get pajamas on. This normally takes parental supervision. They don't just go do it by themselves! Shepherd the kids along with patient nudging, keeping in mind that a peaceful "good night" is around the corner.

Have a Consistent Bedtime Routine

3) Get them into bed with the promise of reading to them for about 10 minutes. They love that time with your voice telling a story, and it is a soothing way to relax. Reading to children is one good predictor of school success.

4) Finish the routine with a little song or a prayer that invites sweet dreams. Especially in stressful times, your last words for the day should help children feel protected.

Remember that bedtime is saying goodbye to the day and to each other. The nurturing routine described takes about an hour but helps children feel secure and loved. It's truly "quality time" and is worth it!

There are a lot of suggestions in this booklet, so your task becomes choosing which ideas fit well for you and your family.

Here is your opportunity to list the ideas you think are important and that you want to commit to starting. Research shows that writing down a decision to change a habit is a very powerful strategy for sticking with it. Once you have made a list here, place your new habit on a calendar, on a note stuck to your bathroom mirror, on your coffee mug...anywhere that you see the reminder daily. Once you DO make a change, you know that you CAN make a change and that feels hopeful!

Important ideas to remember:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

“The shortest answer is doing”

George Herbert