

# Parenting During COVID as a Healthcare Professional

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# Faculty/Presenter Disclosure

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Presenters: Nicola Keyhan, Elia Abi-Jaoude

Relationships with commercial interests:

- None



# Learning Objectives

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At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize potential impacts of COVID-19 on children and families
2. Adapt principles of effective parenting to best support children in context of a pandemic
3. Understand the particular importance of communication, empathy, adaptive coping, routines, boundaries, and self care



# Outline

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- Discuss emotional and social impacts of COVID-19 on general population and for healthcare workers
- Review general principles of parenting, highlighting strategies particularly relevant during a pandemic
- Emphasize importance of exploring thoughts and feelings, maintaining structure and routine, encouraging positive outlooks and using effective coping strategies
- Review the importance of parents taking care of their own emotional needs as an important component of effective parenting



# “Really, You?!!”

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“Do they just ask random people just because they have kids?!!!”

- Luiza, 12 years old



# Life During a Pandemic

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## COVID-19 stress

- Chronic safety threat
- Repeated exposure to unsettling information
- Ongoing uncertainty
- Physical distancing consequences
  - G l v x s w l r q # l q # u r x w l q h v
  - M x j j d q j # n l g v # d q g # z r u n
  - I d p l b d e # f r q i d f w
  - U h g x f h g # v x s s r u w # q h w z r u n v
  - H f r q r p l f # p s d f w #



Mum is  
in a meeting

9.30-11



! DO NOT ENTER !

The answer to your question  
might be here:

upstairs

In the wash

I don't know  
what's for dinner

No

In your bedroom

piece of fruit



# Impact of Pandemic on Frontline Healthcare Workers

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Heightened anxiety due to increased risk of exposures

Emotional distress associated with caring for very sick patients

Supporting colleagues and friends

Increased work pressures

- Continually shifting practices
- Longer hours/extra shifts
- Changes to normal roles/tasks

The impact of these stressors as well as major disruptions to usual family routines related to preventative measures can make parenting tasks particularly challenging during this time







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# General Principles of Parenting

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1. Provide child with love and emotional support
2. Create/maintain structure and routine
3. Set appropriate limits and boundaries
4. Facilitate development of child's self esteem and autonomy
5. Take care of yourself and model healthy coping



# 1. Emotionally Supporting Your Child During COVID-19

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- Check in about how they are feeling; validate their emotions and concerns
- Be on the look out for signs that they are struggling
  - Anxiety, sadness, irritability, somatic symptoms, etc.
  - Note: some kids may be doing better now but more at risk when transition to “normal”
- Be mindful about how you talk to (and in front of) them about the situation
  - Explore their understanding, clarify misinformation, inquire around their questions
  - Provide information that is honest but age and child appropriate
  - Don't provide unnecessary information that may increase anxiety



# Emotionally Supporting Your Child

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- Expect and prepare for possible increases in emotional difficulties during transitional times
- Make lifestyle choices that foster physical and emotional well being
- Make time for activities that facilitate family bonding, provide joy, are calming, and/or are healthy distractions
- Focus on positives, minimize exposure to negatives (i.e., media)
- Maintain any ongoing mental health treatments



## 2. Creating Structure and Routine During COVID-19

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- Particularly important during times of heightened anxiety; will also assist in transition back to more normal routines
- Maintain current structures and routines when possible/appropriate, and establish new routines required in light of “new normal”
- Discuss/engage in division of parenting tasks when possible
- In addition to required activities, remember to schedule daily activities that provide pleasure and comfort, encourage positive family interactions, and provide helpful distractions
- Stick to structure when you can, but don't be inflexible or rigid



# 3. Foster Development of Self-Esteem and Autonomy

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- Continue participation in activities that promote social, emotional, cognitive development (learning new skills, maintaining social networks, etc.)
- Encourage and model the use of adaptive coping that fosters a sense of mastery and control (versus feelings of fear and helplessness)
- Give them coping tools to manage intense emotions (confiding in others, relaxation, journaling, listening to music, exercising, etc.)
- Be aware of the potential for regressions (especially during transitional times) with a plan to work through them if needed



# 4. Setting Appropriate Limits and Boundaries

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- Anticipate new challenges and an exacerbation of pre-existing ones
- Discuss intense feelings and challenging behaviours with your child
  - Acknowledge impact of stressful situation and provide support
  - Explore how child can deal with difficult feelings in healthier ways
- Maintain reasonable expectations for appropriate behaviours and implement consistent and fair consequences for maladaptive ones
- Maximize opportunities for positive reinforcement and provide praise/encouragement when child deals with challenges adaptively



# 5. Taking Care of Yourself During COVID-19

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## ME-TIME





# Taking Care of Yourself

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- Children take their cues about how to feel/respond to a situation based on what their parents' model
- Health care providers are used to taking care of others; may neglect their own needs, including looking after themselves and seeking help
- Some tips for self care:
  - Healthy lifestyle
  - Staying in touch
  - Pleasurable activities and down-time
  - Being aware of personal and professional limits (it's okay to say "no")
  - Resisting tendencies to judge yourself for not being "perfect"
  - Recognizing when you/your partner may be struggling and seeking support when needed



# Conclusions

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- This is a difficult time for everyone, and healthcare workers may be more vulnerable to increased stresses, emotional burdens, and demands on their time, making parenting particularly challenging
- Parents should do their best to understand and support their child's emotional needs while taking care of themselves as well
- Setting boundaries and maintaining structure and routine is important for all children, and may be particularly helpful in times of stress
- Important to prepare and plan for times of transition which can heighten anxieties due to required adjustments to new routines and expectations
- Helpful to focus on positive outlooks (i.e., “this is temporary”), teach and model effective coping, and remember that help is available if needed



# Questions and Discussion

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“Be kind. Be calm. Be safe.”

Bonnie Henry, MD, MPH, FRCPC  
B.C. Provincial Health Officer

