



Nurturing family relationships during the COVID-19 Period

Brought to you by the PTSS team (KKH) • May 2020

With safe distancing measures in place during the COVID-19 period, people have been urged to stay home as much as possible. This can be a rather stressful situation, as families find themselves having to manage much more time together, which can sometimes add to tension and lead to conflicts. Nonetheless, this can also be a good opportunity for us to nurture our family relationships that can be a pillar of support for us in managing the stress during this period.

Here are four tips to help nurture family relationships:

1. Set routines and structure

The COVID-19 situation has taken away familiar work, home and school routines. These changes can be distressing and frustrating for adults, and children and teenagers are no exception. Helping them to set up new daily routines and structure at home during this time can help children and teenagers know what to expect as well as feel a sense of comfort and safety. Some ways include:

- **Drawing up schedules** to structure the day's activities. Have a schedule for all family members, not just children and teenagers. Identify what the activities are and where these activities are done to prevent any miscommunication or conflict over the use of space and items at home. Get your children's/teenagers' inputs on activities, such as letting them decide on activities at certain times of the day. Have a visual daily schedule that your child/ teenager can refer to through the day.
- **Setting daily routines**, such as hand washing and exercise routines. Exercise routines at the start of the day can help relieve some stress for everyone and expend energy from your highly energetic children/ teenagers!



- **Setting personal time.** As much as human beings are social creatures, we all have a need for personal time and space. It may be helpful to understand from your children or teenagers about their need for personal time. Some of us need more quiet time alone, while some may need less. Some prefer to have personal time at the start of the day, while some prefer quiet time alone at the end of the day.

Respect and allow for these different needs within your family. One way to do so is for your family members to set aside personal time in their own schedules and to communicate this to one another beforehand. This enables family members to have a common understanding of one other's needs for personal time and space, reducing possible frustrations or conflicts that may arise.

2. Provide positive attention

The COVID-19 situation can be stressful for children and teenagers, who may have difficulties regulating their emotions and behaviours. This can sometimes make getting along at home, challenging for one another. Providing positive attention to your children or teenagers can be helpful in building a healthy relationship with them. A close and supportive relationship provides a foundation for children and teenagers to share their thoughts and feelings, as well as seek support from you when needed. Ways to provide positive attention:

- Catch your child being good. Provide attention and descriptive praise when you notice your child or teenager doing something good. (E.g. "That was really responsible of you to clean the area after doing your art!")
- Make time for quality family time. Where possible, schedule in time to do activities together as a family. Below are some ideas for family time:



Type of activity	Examples of activity
Communication and connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a "check-in time" at the end of the day for family members to gather and share their thoughts and feelings about the day. Some suggestions for check-ins that you may like to use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One good thing about my day was... • One thing I wished could have been different was... • One thing I am grateful for today is... • Teenagers may not be as comfortable talking with their parents or caregivers. Consider different ways for family members to share their thoughts and feelings (e.g. drawing, texting or writing, sharing a song they have chosen that represents their thoughts or feelings for the day). • Have a "questions time" for children to ask any questions they may have and parents or caregivers to address them
Play and crafts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play card games and board games together. More ideas for other games: https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/stories/19-games-family-bonding-during-covid-19 • Play ideas for preschoolers: https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Motor-Activity-and-Self-Play.aspx • Play ideas for primary schoolers: https://blog.cincinnatichildrens.org/simple-home-activity-ideas-for-kids-during-covid-19
Culture and exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual tours of museums, zoos and theme parks: https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/travel/a31784720/best-virtual-tours/ • Plays to watch together with preschoolers to teenagers: https://www.dramanotebook.com/watch-free-plays-online/
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For children, workouts inspired by popular characters: https://family.disney.com/articles/disney-workouts/ • Search Youtube for workout videos: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workout with songs that your child/teenager likes, such as K-Kardio and KpopX which use Korean pop songs. • Circuit workouts, such as High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) and Tabata.

3. Manage conflicts positively



Under usual circumstances, family conflicts may happen from time to time. Even more so, under the stressful COVID-19 situation, it is natural that conflicts in the family may arise. Parents and caregivers can manage a conflict positively by:

- Responding in a calm manner. Talk to your children or teenagers in a calm and assuring manner. Your calm demeanour can help them to calm down and de-escalate the conflict.
- Acknowledging emotions. Help your children to identify and name their emotions. This can help them to calm down and feel heard and understood. For example, you could say, "It makes sense that you are feeling angry because you can't go out to play now."

- Taking time to calm down. We tend to respond in a reactive manner when we are upset and feeling intense emotions. It can be beneficial for family members to pause and take some time to calm down before addressing the issue at hand together.

4. Take care of your well-being

Children and teenagers often look to adults in their environment to learn how to respond to various situations and their feelings about them. As such, parents and caregivers serve as important role models to their children and teenagers in managing emotions, such as anxiety, stress or worries about the current COVID-19 situation. Being able to regulate your emotions and manage your stress enables you to have the capacity to nurture your relationships with your family too. To do that, you will need to first take care of your own physical and mental well-being.

For tips on supporting your children or teenagers' well-being, check out our earlier issue, "[Five Tips for Helping Your Child or Teenager Cope with COVID-19 Related Distress](#)", in our COVID-19 Special Edition. Look out for our coming issue for tips on self-care for parents/ caregivers!

Resources:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide/coronavirus-physical-distancing-and-family-wellbeing>
- <https://nyulangone.org/news/how-address-family-conflict-your-childs-behavioral-problems-during-covid-19-pandemic>



Trauma Network for Children



The Stay Prepared – Trauma Network for Children (TNC) programme is a joint collaboration between KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and Temasek Foundation. It aims to enhance the psychosocial capability of the Singapore community to support children and youth after crises or traumatic events.