

Building family resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic

With the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and current stay-at-home orders, many people have changed the way they live, work, study and function as a family.

It can be challenging to support children through uncertainty and change, but all families have the capacity to bounce back – and even bounce forward – during challenging times.

It is OK not to feel OK, but these tips can help you feel more in control and more able to cope with the current stressful environment.

Note: It is important to acknowledge that the word ‘family’ will mean many different things to each person.

Recognise each other’s strengths and develop a plan

When families can recognise the different strengths of each person, the family unit is more likely to be able to develop a support plan which works for each member and the whole family. What can each person contribute? What does each person need?

Try to keep family routines and a sense of stability

Routines create a sense of predictability and stability for family members during difficult times. Creating and maintaining routines within your family can be important – for example, keeping mealtimes the same, the same amount of ‘screen time’ as usual, or keeping up exercise, even if the type of exercise needs to change.

Look after yourself and practice ‘self-care’

Taking time to rest, recharge and reconnect improves our ability to parent and care for others. Find small ways to practice self-care, each day if you can. This might be 10 minutes alone in the garden, taking a short walk with the dog, doing a guided meditation, or chatting with a friend on the telephone.

Spend family time together and celebrate milestones

When things change, we can get caught up in getting through the day-to-day activities and ‘must do’s’ and forget to spend time together as a family. Schedule family time and remember to celebrate birthdays and achievements in some way.

Tackle problems and disagreements constructively

Maintaining positive feelings about family life even during stressful periods within a family can make a big difference. Working together to solve everyday problems can build a sense of support within a family.

Talk honestly and clearly with each other

Good communication can reduce stress and improve relationships. Tell others what you need and be open to hearing what they have to say.

Keeping communication open and positive

The way we communicate within families can be affected by the amount of stress and uncertainty around us. Families will manage better when they communicate openly and involve everyone – sharing information in age appropriate ways.

- ✓ **Level with a family member.** Levelling involves giving the other person information about your thoughts and feelings in a non-confrontational way, rather than expecting them to read your mind.
- ✓ **Listen without speaking.** Pay attention to what family members are saying without thinking about what you are going to say next and try not to challenge their point of view.
- ✓ **Validate their point of view.** Let the family member know that you have heard them. It does not necessarily mean that you understand or even agree with their opinion, but listen and respond in a caring manner.
- ✓ **Use “I” statements to express your point of view.** Sometimes we need to own our own thoughts or feelings. We can communicate this to our family members by using “I” statements such as “I feel/think/want/need....”

Provide additional support to family members who need it

Asking others for help during tough times can sometimes feel like a daunting task and many families may feel reluctant to do so. It is important to remember that family, friends and neighbours may not know that you need help, but would be more than happy to step in if asked. Remember that a range of services and supports are available to talk to.

Support Services

Adult

Lifeline: 13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

mensline.org.au

Youth

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

kidshelpline.com.au

headspace: 1800 650 890

headspace.org.au

ReachOut: Reachout.com

Other resources

Head to Health: mental health portal

headtohealth.gov.au

Life in Mind: suicide prevention portal

lifeinmind.org.au

SANE: online forums saneforums.org

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander: healthinonet.ecu.edu.au

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex: qlife.org.au 1800 184 527

Culturally and linguistically diverse: embracemantalhealth.org.au