

Dear Families,

As the unprecedented circumstances surrounding COVID-19 continue to change day to day you and your children are very much on my mind. I am quite sure you are inundated with information and trying to figure out the best way to support your family. Not to add to the onslaught of information pouring in, but hopefully to serve as a resource of ideas and suggestions, I put together the following in the hope that this might help as you navigate your family through these uncharted waters.

I want to share some words of wisdom from Lynn Lyons, who is a therapist and author, and expert in the field of anxiety and families. I have read her books and incorporate many of her recommendations (some described below) in my own practice.

I consider reality a balance between chaos and order, always aiming for more order in my life than chaos. With the days of order seeming like a distant memory, I hope you will find at least one thing in the list below that will help bring more order into your home, or at the very least, reduce some of the chaos.

CELEBRATE UNIQUELY - What your child will be missing - This doesn't just apply to adolescents who will be missing prom and graduation, etc. Many of the children I work with will be missing their own birthday party, special school performances, athletic events/seasons, outdoor Ed, etc. This is a time where YOUR creativity will be important. Celebrate your child, whatever they will be missing, figure out a unique way you can commemorate their special experience in a different way. For example, birthday parties with all your child's stuffed animals symbolizing the guests, or a wall collage of photographs of all the friends and family who wished they could be in attendance. For those kids missing class outdoor Ed experience - this could be time to make a fort in the living room where the family (even pets) sleep in sleeping bags and use flashlights only. I think you get my point; the SHOW MUST GO ON - only in a different and more creative way. While it won't be what they originally expected it **will be** a story they will tell and remember forever.

WALL-ART

1. **Wall of FLEXIBILITY** - Let's face it, we are bound to get on each other's nerves from time-to-time (and sometimes that happens before breakfast!) We need to start focusing on all of our "moments" of flexibility. Pick a wall or area in your house. Get a bunch of sticky notes - when any of you notice someone in your family showing signs of flexibility, write it down and stick it up on the wall. This gives an important visual of how you are coming together as a family during this trying time. Flexibility sticky notes are contagious - if it appears one person is regularly mentioned, others may want that same kind of attention and soon flexibility within your family will grow.
2. **Wall of SIBLING-LOVE** - Or at least "**sibling-like**". Anytime you or a family member notice your child and/or their sibling showing an act of kindness - write it down and stick it on your wall of SIBLING-LOVE.
3. **Wall of GRATITUDE** - (I need this!) With so many things stripped from our day, it is too easy to get lost in the things that are hard, or things we can't do or have.... This is time for gratitude. Have everyone in your family write down at least 2 things they are grateful for every day and stick it up on the wall. This will be a very helpful visual when we begin to feel sad, lonely, ect.

HIGHLIGHT YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Great family dinner conversation starters:

During this experience, I have learned _____ about myself.

Don't be surprised if your child initially starts off with something negative, that is more human nature than anything. If you have a child who ONLY wants to share the negative things, have an agreement (as opposed to a rule) that for every 1 negative you have to share 2 positives.....Children do not typically have the opportunity to talk about things they have learned about themselves.... They can talk about things they have learned (what they are taught at school) - but rarely what they learn about themselves - it is different and yet, **very important**.

HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU SAY?

Answer your kids' questions and talk about the Coronavirus according to the developmental stage of your child- younger children do not need too much information and it is best to answer their questions simply without offering extra information that isn't asked for. View the news yourself then summarize it for your children. Limit the media and news for them. Even our adult nervous systems are not evolved enough to maintain regulation when we are being thrown unsettling news 24/7. If you are anxious, wait until a time when you are feeling more grounded and calmer to talk about it.

ROUTINES - Especially sleep routines

Keeping your child's **circadian rhythms** on a normal/regular schedule will help their overall physical and mental wellbeing. Circadian Rhythms is our inner clock. When our rhythms are in balance, we are more able to perform and cope at our natural capacity. Sleep is a primary function of our inner clock. Maintain routines and schedules as best you can with some flexibility-get dressed each day, keep meals and bedtime consistent.

PICK YOUR BATTLES - What will you be rigid about and where is there some flexibility? Talk about it. Perhaps the rigidity is in hand washing and hygiene, as well as social distancing. The flexibility might be in online gaming, when you get up in the morning. What works for your family?

AUTONOMY - Your children are used to practicing autonomy every day at school without you- How can you help them maintain autonomy at home? Give them things to do on their own such as laundry, helping prep or make meals, walk the family pet if old enough, what other responsibilities in the household can you think of? Discuss ways your child can continue to act and be autonomous while sheltering in place. The independence that comes from autonomy is an important part of earning one's self confidence.

MEANING - TEACHING EMPATHY

What meaningful things can your child do, within their control that can brighten someone's day? Lynn Lyons suggested doing 3 things every day that brightens someone's day. They can be little things such as recognizing something someone does, "I really like how you made an effort

to clean up after yourself.” Call a grandparent and check in on them, bring someone their favorite thing to drink, write a note and leave it on a family member’s pillow. Here is an opportunity for your child to make a difference in the lives of someone else. The result is an intrinsic realization that it truly is *better to give than to receive*.

At the end of the day, if it ever feels like it’s all too much, shift your focus to what you want your children to remember of this unprecedented time - ***how you connected as a family***. Make it less about achievement, making things perfect and what they missed out on, and more so on how your family connected with one another and those around you. Such things are worth MORE than its weight in gold.

My thoughts and best wishes are with you all.