



# Family Engagement Newsletter

## Ways to Promote Children's Resilience to the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Wendy Overturf—[Adapted from article](#) by Jessica Bartlett and Rebecca Vivrette, Child Trends

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated social and economic stressors can undermine children's development and well-being. Not only must they cope with major changes to everyday life, such as physical distancing and home confinement, but their families may struggle to meet their basic physical and emotional needs. The good news is that over four decades of research on resilience shows that protective factors can buffer children from harm and increase the chances they adapt positively to adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic..

### **Protective factor #1: Sensitive, responsive caregiving**

The primary factor in a child's recovery from an adverse or traumatic event is the presence of a sensitive and caring adult. During COVID-19, children need to maintain regular age-appropriate connections to important adults in their lives. For example, young children may need more face-to-face time for connections than older children and adolescents, who are able to connect virtually.

#### **Parents and other caregivers can:**

- Spend quality time with children. Even short periods of time playing, reading, going outdoors, and talking can bolster children's sense of safety and security during uncertain or scary times.
- Stay connected even when physical separation is necessary for safety reasons. Set up times for children to talk to distant caregivers using video chats, phone calls, emails, or texts. These connections are important in helping children feel secure and supported.

### **Protective factor #2: Meeting basic needs**

Meeting the basic needs of children and families—such as food, shelter, clothing, and medical and mental health care—is essential to protecting children's well-being in stressful times.

#### **Parents and other caregivers can:**

- Know that asking for help is a sign of strength and resourcefulness, not weakness.
- Identify helpful local services through a child's current service provider, school, or early care and education program. Check the [WI FACETS webpage](#) and [WI FACETS Facebook](#) page for links to potential resources.

### **Protective factor #3: Emotional support for children**

Emotional and behavioral changes in children are to be expected during a pandemic, as everyone adjusts to a change in daily routines. Some children may show signs of emotional distress (e.g., clinginess, anxiety, sadness, anger). But with strong emotional support most children will return to their typical level of functioning from before the pandemic.

#### **Parents and other caregivers can:**

- Use the 3 Rs (reassurance, routines, regulation): Reassure children about their safety and the safety of loved ones; maintain predictable routines (e.g., sleeping, eating, learning, playing); support children's regulation skills by helping them manage difficult feelings (e.g., deep breathing, movement, quiet time); and make time for emotional "check-ins").
- Emphasize the positive. Stories of hope and resilience provide an important counterbalance to negativity and fear about the pandemic. If books are unavailable at home, try accessing [free online books](#) for children and teens.

### **Protective factor #4: Support for caregiver well-being**

When parents' and other caregivers' needs are met, children are more likely to receive sensitive and responsive care. Protecting adults' mental and physical health is an effective strategy for promoting children's well-being during and after a pandemic.

#### **Parents and other care givers can:**

- Whenever possible, prioritize time and energy for activities that are most important and meaningful to caregivers and their families (e.g., enjoyable activities with family at home, celebrating birthdays and other important milestones, connecting with friends and focus on what can be reasonably accomplished under the circumstances).
- Take breaks from work and caregiving responsibilities. Even short periods of time spent on self-care (e.g., rest, exercise, mindfulness, reading, praying) can benefit the whole family.
- Reach out to family members, friends, religious groups, and professionals who can offer support for managing emotional and mental health challenges, such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

### **Protective factor #5: Social connectedness**

Positive social connections are important protective factors for both children and adults during a pandemic. Although in-person contact may be limited, physical distancing should not turn into social isolation.

#### **Parents and other caregivers can:**

- Spend virtual time regularly with extended family members and friends (e.g., online or by mail, depending on each family's resources).
- Connect virtually to others through common hobbies and opportunities to help in the community, which can be rewarding and meaningful (e.g., donating supplies, writing letters to older adults).

## Statewide Event



### [Endless Possibilities Conference 2020: A Closer Look at Invisible Disabilities](#) 8/7/2020

#### **Keynote: Navigating Unfamiliar Spaces with an Invisible Disability.**

Presenter Christina Irene, author of "Talking Splat: Communicating About Our Hidden Disabilities."

#### **Sessions:**

- Communicating About Hidden Disabilities: Tips and Tools
- NAMI Mental Health & Verbal De-escalation Training
- Compassion Resilience
- Breaking the Phonics Code for Struggling Readers
- Textbook IEP's - Bridging the Cultural Barriers (Bilingual)
- Basics of Autism within Special Education
- Section 504
- Supporting Neurodiversity
- Success Stories Panel
- Invisible Disabilities and Bullying

Registration will open in early May.  
[WI FACETS website](#)

**8/7/20 Endless Possibilities Conference**  
Registration Fee: \$40. Lunch included.  
Some parent scholarships available.

**8/6/20 Pre-conference options:**  
- Youth Mental Health First Aid  
- Serving on Groups Training of Trainers  
Registration Fee: \$20. Lunch on your own.

**Dates: August 6-7, 2020**  
**Location: UW-Whitewater, University Center**



## At Home Learning Strategies



### Tips to Get Your Child Ready to Learn at Home

(Adapted from [understood.org](#))

Most children and families are now involved in some type of home learning. Therefore, this month the focus of this section is devoted to giving tips on how to prepare your child for online learning at home.

#### **Create a learning space for your child.**

It's important to set up a quiet, clutter-free area if your child is learning full-time from home.

#### **Make a schedule and stick to it. (As much as possible)**

Take a look at your family's schedule and figure out the best times for learning. See an [example of a daily schedule](#).

#### **Reduce distractions.**

Video games, computer games, social media, TV, toys, pets—our homes have lots of distractions. Make a list of the things that distract your child. Then, find ways to limit them during learning time.

#### **Use a calendar and color-code it.**

It's important to set up systems to help your child stay on top of school deadlines. This will help your child stay organized. Post a calendar and mark it with due dates. Help your child plan backwards from the due dates. Use visual organizers to break an assignment down into steps and the specific strategies needed to complete it. You can also use color-coding for tasks. For example, use a red pen for reading and a blue pen for math.

#### **Get plenty of exercise.**

Exercise helps us think better. When we move and groove, our problem-solving, memory, and attention improve. Physical activity is a natural way to reduce stress and prevent anxiety. Experts say that when we move and get our heart rate up, it has a positive impact on how we think. Look for family-friendly workouts you can do at home. Right now there are many [free exercise programs online](#).

#### **See which accessibility features help your child.**

Most phones, laptops, and other mobile devices have built-in assistive technology. For example, read aloud or text-to-speech can help struggling readers, and speech-to-text can help struggling writers. On YouTube, you can adjust the settings to slow down the playback speed if your child is having trouble understanding videos. You can also change the settings to show closed captions if it helps your child to read the text while listening to videos.

#### **Reach out to your child's teacher.**

To support your child, set up a direct line of communication with your child's teachers. Most teachers are available to at least some extent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use email, text, phone calls, or maybe even video conferencing to connect.



#### **Free Online Events and Activities for Kids at Home**

Visual story times, virtual drawing lessons, music classes & performances, learning activities and even tools to help you find free or reduced-cost internet in your area.

#### **Online Teaching Resources for Children and Families**

From Wide Open School, a free collection of the best online learning experiences for kids curated by the editors at **Common Sense**. (You can select that you are a family and find resources for different age groups in a number of categories including [Special Needs](#) and [English Learners](#).)



**Please complete the Family Engagement Newsletter Survey on page 3 .**



## Online Resources



### [Mental Health America of Wisconsin](#)

Clickable map with resources by county in Wisconsin.

### [Taking Care of Yourself](#)

Fact sheet from National Child Traumatic Stress Network that outlines ideas for self-care by promoting awareness, balance, & connection.

### [COVID-19 Resources for Parents, Families & Youth](#)

A collection of resources from the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (NFFCMH). Videos, toolkits and activities to use at home and more to support parents and caregivers and their children. Topics include: Self Care and Coping with Stress/Anxiety; Supporting Youth and Young Adults; Specific Diagnoses and Special Needs and more.

### [How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

For teenagers that may be feeling alone, isolated, or anxious while dealing with physical and social distancing, UNICEF provides a list of six strategies that teens can use to manage their feelings and emotions during this difficult time.

### [COVID-19: Resilient Wisconsin](#)

Webpage from Resilient Wisconsin that includes tips to feel stronger and more connected and resources, including the [Caregiver Help Desk](#), for coping with the mental and emotional struggles of our current situation.

### [Positive Parenting & COVID-19: 10 Tips to Help Keep the Calm at Home](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers these tips for families facing long periods of time isolated at home during the COVID-19 outbreak.

### [Disaster Distress Hotline](#)

The Disaster Distress Helpline, a federal crisis hotline, has seen a huge spike in calls of people seeking help recently. The national helpline, run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), provides counseling for people facing emotional distress during times of natural and human-caused disasters. In March, the helpline saw a 338% increase in call volume compared with February, according to spokesperson with the agency. Compared to last year for the month of March, they had an 891% increase of calls.

The pandemic has disrupted normal life routines and lead people to feel isolated as they stay home to curb the spread of the virus. "Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after a disaster", cites the [program's website](#). The helpline is a free resource that is offering counseling and support to anyone in emotional distress due to the disaster. They can provide advice on how to cope and offer information on how to spot signs of distress in friends and family members. Crisis counselors can also provide referrals to local crisis centers for follow up care.

Staff is available 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. People can call, 1-800-985-5990, or even text, TalkWithUs to 66746, to be connected to a trained counselor.

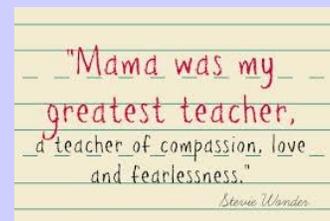


*Is this newsletter a useful resource for you in your work and/or in your home?*

*Please complete this 3-Question [survey](#) and let us know. Thank you!*



*The meaning of being a mother is virtually endless. A mother is a protector, disciplinarian and friend. A mother is a selfless, loving human who must sacrifice many of their wants and needs for the wants and needs of their children. A mother works hard to make sure their child is equipped with the knowledge, skills and abilities to make it as a competent human being. Being a mother is perhaps the hardest, most rewarding job a woman will ever experience.*



**Event title links to information & registration for WI FACETS FREE workshops & webinars:**

By phone, Sandra: 877-374-0511

**All webinars 12:00—1:00 PM (unless otherwise noted)**

[WSEMS: Mediation](#)

**Date:** May 4, 2020

**Presenter:** Courtney Salzer, WI FACETS and Nissan Bar Lev, CESA 7

[Getting and Keeping Your First Job](#)

**Date:** May 5, 2020

**Presenter:** Matthew Zellmer, WI FACETS

[WI Transition App](#)

**Date:** May 6, 2020

**Presenter:** Brenda Swoboda, WI Transition Improvement Grant

[IEP 9: Parent Rights in the IEP Process](#)

**Date:** May 13, 2020

**Presenter:** Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

[Pasos al Éxito para Comunicarse de Manera Efectiva con la Escuela de su Hijo](#)

**Date:** May 14, 2020

**Presenter:** Samson Srok, WI FACETS

To register, contact Samson Srok (414) 374-4645, [ssrok@wifacets.org](mailto:ssrok@wifacets.org)

[IEP 10: Useful Resources in the IEP Process](#)

**Date:** May 19, 2020

**Presenter:** Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

[Finding Your Passion: How to Become a Good Advocate in Your Community](#)

**Date:** May 19, 2020 4-5 pm

**Presenter:** Jessie Benash, UW-Whitewater

[Family Engagement through PBIS & RtI](#)

**Date:** May 20, 2020

**Presenter:** Jennifer Grenke and Dan Seaman, WI RtI Center

[Supporting Literacy at Home in the Summer](#)

**Date:** May 21, 2020

**Presenter:** Jan Serak, Serak Consulting

[Charters, School Choice and Vouchers](#)

**Date:** May 27, 2020



## Encourage Your Children to Become Helpers

Excerpt From: [Don't just look for helpers, be a helper](#)

The world might feel terrible right now, with a pandemic spreading across the globe, but, somehow, there are still people out there caring for others....as we cobble together our family coping strategies right now, it doesn't hurt to keep in mind that well-intended attempts at generosity yield rewards for all parties involved. Sincerity is key, and it's the part that will be most tricky to teach to your children. One of the easiest ways to teach your children to be helpers is by doing more helping yourself. "Modeling, also called observational learning, is one of the most underestimated and poorly used tools by parents," said Alan Kazdin, professor of psychology and child psychiatry at Yale University. Kazdin said modeling generosity can begin by simply appreciating generosity in others. Did you hear about something nice someone did for someone else? Point it out. When parents do it themselves, they should make a habit of telling their children about it. Though, importantly, do not boast about it. "Be instructive, kind and gentle, rather than righteous," Kazdin said. In order to get kids to help on their own from a sincere place, Kazdin suggests starting small and practicing it over and over. Doing something simple like saying "thank you" or "I love you" to grandma, even if it is emotionless and rote at first, will eventually become internalized. This is especially the case if they can see how happy it makes grandma, and their parents gently note the same.

## Research to Read

### Adolescents' Motivations to Engage in Social Distancing During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Associations with Mental and Social Health

Oosterhoff, B., palmer, C., Wilson, J., & Shook, N. (2020, April 6). Adolescents' Motivations to Engage in Social Distancing during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Associations with Mental and Social Health.

#### Article Link

Reducing the spread of infectious disease during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic prompted recommendations for individuals to limit physical contact with others and engage in social distancing. Less is known about why youth are engaging in social distancing and how these motivations are connected with their engagement, mental health, and social health. Using a large sample of adolescents from across the United States, this study examined adolescents' motivations for social distancing, their engagement in social distancing, and their mental and social health.

The most commonly reported motivations for social distancing concerned social responsibility and not wanting others to get sick. Motivations concerning state or city lockdowns, parental rules, and social responsibility were associated with greater social distancing, whereas motivations concerning no alternatives were associated with less social distancing. Engagement in social distancing was not significantly associated with adolescents' mental or social health. However, specific motivations for social distancing were differentially associated with adolescents' anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, burdensomeness, and belongingness. **Conclusions:** Understanding adolescents' motivations to engage in social distancing may help inform strategies to increase social distancing engagement, reduce pathogen transmission, and improve mental and social health during pandemics.

This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org).*



## **Contributions to the Newsletter**

**Upcoming newsletter topics: June: ADD/ADHD**

**July: Speech & Language**

**August: Other Health Impairment**

*To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to [woverturf@wifacets.org](mailto:woverturf@wifacets.org). If unable to access form, you may send information in an email.*

*Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.*

***The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter  
can be found online at:***

***<https://servingongroups.org/resources>***



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