

## **Stuck At Home? How To Thrive During The COVID-19 Lockdown.**

At this point, we are all in the same boat—no matter where you find yourself in the world. You may be a parent with your children at home, be working remotely, or none of the above. Either way, most of us are, or know someone who is, at home during this global health crisis. Schools are already up and running doing online learning through Google Classroom, Google Meet, and other great platforms. As a psychologist, I am seeing different feelings going around, from anxiety rising up and OCD symptoms being triggered, to children feeling depressed because they have to stay home. The fear of the unknown is creeping in since most of us are not sure how long this will last. The entire world is facing the same challenges and anxious feelings. We all have to come together and thrive during this time of crisis and view this as a new adventure our kids have to face. Here are some common questions I have been getting this week, with some solutions:

### **1. How do I talk to my kids about COVID-19 and decrease their anxiety?**

By now, our children have heard of the virus that is keeping most of us at home. They are already exposed to so many social media platforms. We must assume they are in the loop and have already absorbed large volumes of information. We have noticed over the last few weeks that anxiety and panic levels are on the rise all over the world. It started with people waiting in line for hours to enter supermarkets and then panic buying in bulk, leaving the supermarket shelves empty. If someone saw a person buying 10 toilet paper rolls, they would buy 15. This is how the chaos started. Personally, as I observed people loading up their carts, my first instinctual fear—like everyone else’s—was, “Will the stores be able to keep up and restock?”

The reason for the chaos is because, as humans, we like to be in control, and we fear the unknown, so COVID-19 makes us feel out of control. However, it is important as parents to our young children, teens, and even our older parents to not panic over this virus. If our kids see us panicking, they will not feel safe and protected. We are their role models, and they will be looking at our behavior and reacting accordingly. Moreover, minimizing excessive discussions and having the news on in front of our children will help reduce their anxiety. Asking your child how they feel and letting them know that they are safe and that their feelings are being heard can be helpful.

### **2. How can I/we thrive while staying home and still keep to a schedule?**

This can be a new and fun experience for our kids. In their minds, they get to stay home! I imagine that most kids were so excited on day 1, but that reality started to set in soon thereafter. My three kids (ages 8, 12, and 14) are already missing their friends and being physically in school. However, helping them be creative and creating a plan is important since some parents may be working virtually and may need quiet time to get through some very tough weeks ahead.

- Create an hourly schedule for your children (wake-up time, breakfast time, schoolwork time, playing outside, screen time, dinner, and bedtime). As I am writing this, two of my kiddos have been thinking of ways to stay connected and not isolate themselves in their rooms. They built a classroom fort in one of their rooms so that they can stay together. I feel this is one of the positives of being stuck together for hours. As a family, you will

become closer. Kids are creative, and they will find a way to interact with one another and use their imaginations.

- I talk to my clients and children about screen time a lot and encourage them to text less and to have more face-to-face time with their peers. I always hear, “No, no one does that anymore!” Well, interestingly, since going remote on Friday March 13, 2020, this is exactly what all the kids are talking about. Teens are fearful of becoming sad and isolated without their friends. Face time has become their first choice, and this craving to meet one on one is stronger than ever before among our young generations. You see, because schools have closed and families are limiting contact as a precaution, kids are craving what they can’t have. I think it is one of the positives of this crisis. Another positive is that kids are appreciating school again! How many of your kids have said, “Aaarrghh! I hate school,” or “I don’t want to go to school”?

### **3. How can we stay connected with our friends and as a family?**

- Get out those board games and create an hour or two of family time. Although we are working virtually, take a moment to breathe and connect. If your child is in their room for too long, encourage them to come out and take a break. It is important for us to communicate as a family now more than ever. Validate your child’s feelings and be the ear that listens. We will all get through this!

Check out UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center for some free guided mindfulness exercises, and practice focusing on one positive statement each day. <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/default.cfm>.