



Supporting Staff, Families, and Children During Social Distancing

Head Start Heals - Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How can I support families during COVID-19 and social distancing?

You're stuck at home, either alone or with everyone in your family—and the only outing is a trip to the supermarket. Humans are social animals after all. We're evolutionarily wired for proximity to each other. So, these new protocols (staying six feet apart, voluntarily quarantining as much as possible) are necessary, but may not be natural.

Even when you're totally healthy, not having social interactions can hurt both your physical and mental well-being. What You Can Do:

- **Acknowledge what's happening, and that it's stressful.** Because it is.
- **Stay connected.** Social distancing does not mean social isolation. You can still FaceTime, call, text, have a Zoom happy hour with your friends.
- **Try breathing exercises.** Mindful breathing where you match your inhale breath with your exhale breath and focus on scanning your body is calming. You don't have to spend 20 minutes, even three minutes of focused breathing can help.
- **Be kind.** It doesn't just benefit someone else; you reap the rewards too. According to research, when you do something nice for someone else, your brain's pleasure and reward centers light up. It's called the "helper's high."
- **Share something good.** Even if it's something small or mundane, like a funny meme or cute picture. Letting someone else in on it, amplifies the good feelings you got from it.
- **Change your expectations.** You add to your own stress levels by creating goals that are unrealistic. Be easy on yourself.
 - **Let go of the need to be perfect.** Set goals that are realistic and set a reasonable standard for "good enough." Allow yourself to make mistakes, and realize that these are part of the learning process. Everyone makes mistakes. Know that you don't have to be good at everything, and it does take time to become good at something new. Just like learning to walk.
 - **Stop comparing yourself to other people.** Everyone has their own unique strengths, abilities, and journey in life. Stop basing your own worth in comparison to other people. Instead, embrace your individuality and be true to yourself.

- **Realize that you're not superhuman.** Trying to do everything for everyone is a recipe for disaster. Learn to prioritize, have appropriate boundaries and learn to say no. Do those things that are most important and give yourself time to rest and recuperate. Learn to delegate or drop those things that are a lesser priority and have more reasonable standards. It all comes back to letting go of perfection.
- **Understand that you're not the same all the time.** We all have good and bad days. When you're unwell or going through a rough time, you naturally won't be at your best. Even when you are well, your energy levels will fluctuate. If you're unwell, focus on recovering
- **Manage your news intake.** It is way too easy to get sucked into watching press conference after press conference and then to check for updates on websites or to obsessively check in on the number of confirmed cases in your state. Being informed doesn't require you to act like you're a newsroom producer. It's okay to set a couple of times a day where you'll check in for updates. And, stick to reliable news outlets. Rumors spread quickly and feed into the panic. Try to only read or hear validated information

Additional Resources:

Mindfulness Practices for Families

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3406-mindfulness-practices-for-families>

Talking With Children About Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for Parents, School Staff, and Others Working With Children

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

Stay Connected to Decrease Family Stress in Difficult Times

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/blog/stay-connected-decrease-family-stress-difficult-times>

Supporting Food Security for Families

[http://hsicc.cmail20.com/t/ViewEmail/j/](http://hsicc.cmail20.com/t/ViewEmail/j/C89C76218E8A70C12540EF23F30FEDED/79A087682734D8FDC67FD2F38AC4859C)

[C89C76218E8A70C12540EF23F30FEDED/79A087682734D8FDC67FD2F38AC4859C](http://hsicc.cmail20.com/t/ViewEmail/j/C89C76218E8A70C12540EF23F30FEDED/79A087682734D8FDC67FD2F38AC4859C)

Home Activities and Tips

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/home-activities-tips>

Q. How can I support a pregnant woman during COVID-19?

It's normal to have fears and questions in uncertain times, however being mindful can reduce these stressors. Mindfulness has been found to help relieve anxiety, depression, and stress during pregnancy. Research also suggests that mindfulness during pregnancy could positively affect babies after birth by reducing maternal anxiety.

Relaxing your body by practicing breathing exercises such as stretching, meditating, or engaging in mindful movements such as slow, intentional activity like walking, yoga, light exercise, and breathing exercise. Eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, staying physically isolated but staying social can support physical and mental health while pregnant.

Be mindful: Practice simple mindfulness techniques, such as a breathing exercise – for example, a technique called “4-7-8.” This technique involves sitting comfortably with good posture and counting with the “in breath” to four, holding your breath to a count of seven, and exhaling to a count of eight. Do this four times and then breathe normally, practicing as needed.

Eat a healthy diet: Comfort foods have their place during crises. But remember to stick to a healthy diet, including fruits, vegetables, and lots of water to drink. All pregnant women should avoid using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. If you've struggled with substance use, the stress of the pandemic can increase cravings.

Get enough sleep: Sleep resets the body and mind, supporting our immune systems and our mental health. Both are particularly important to take care of during pregnancy. Pregnant women need seven to nine hours of sleep a night. Establish a good sleep routine to help achieve this goal:

- Go to bed at a consistent time every day, even on the weekends.
- Avoid caffeine a few hours before bed.
- Shut off devices at least two hours before you go to bed.

Limiting device time reduces light stimulation, which can make falling asleep difficult. It also reduces opportunities to feed the “worry loop” – when your stress relief method ultimately causes more anxiety, as when, for example, you're perusing Facebook for funny memes and stumble across a distressing COVID-19 story.

Human connection will help reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, boredom, and loneliness. Though we can't physically be with loved ones right now, we can connect in other ways. Consider using Skype, FaceTime, or another video chat service to visit during the pandemic. Seeing each other's faces can be reassuring and calming. Text and talk on the phone with a supportive family member or friend regularly – use the time to brighten each other's day or to share your concerns.

Virtual social groups are booming as well. You might enjoy a hobby- or fitness-focused online group that offers fun ideas to craft or work out indoors. Just be cautious of getting medical advice online. Social media influencers often are paid to endorse products and services they don't use or know enough about, which could potentially be detrimental to your pregnancy.

Managing stress is important for any pregnant patient, and that's especially true during the pandemic. Remember – you are not alone.

Additional Resources:

Covid-19: Managing Your Stress Level While You Are Pregnant

<https://naitreetgrandir.com/fr/nouvelles/2020/04/21/covid19-managing-stress-pregnancy/>

Self-Care Tips For A Healthier 'Pandemic Pregnancy: Tips To Manage 'Pandemic Pregnancy' Stress

<https://utswmed.org/medblog/tips-manage-pandemic-pregnancy-stress/>

If You Are Pregnant, Breastfeeding, or Caring for Young Children

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

Q. How can we prevent teacher burnout?

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion. Teacher burnout is one of the biggest problems facing the American education system today. So how do you keep your passion alive in an age of strict standards, individualized education, and other teaching challenges?

- Get enough sleep.
- Get enough to eat.
- Prepare ahead of schedule.
- Vary the work that you do.
- Do some light exercise.
- Do something pleasurable.
- Focus on what you did well.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Share a private joke.
- Pray, meditate or relax.
- Support a colleague.

Your empathy for others helps you do your job. It is important to take good care of your feelings and thoughts by monitoring how you use them. The most resilient workers are those that know how to turn their feelings to work mode when they go on duty, but off-work mode when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (feelings switched to work mode) and maximum support while resting (feelings switched off-work mode).

A trusted supervisor and/or the HR professionals can also support their staff.

With many organizations requiring employees to stay out of the office, it's more important than ever to encourage and facilitate regular communication with employees. Here are tips for managers and human resource professionals in supporting employees in staying connected to the workplace and each other:

- **Show empathy and be available:** Understand that employees are likely feeling overwhelmed and anxious about circumstances related to the virus. Make yourself available to your staff to talk about fears, to answer questions and to reassure them about work and other issues that might come up.
- **Stay connected with communication and meeting tools:** Use virtual meeting options with video, like Zoom or JoinMe, for regular check-ins and to allow teams to connect with one another “face-to-face.”
- **Recognize the impact of isolation and loneliness:** Working remotely can cause people to feel isolated, making it more important to routinely check in with your team, not only about their work product, but also to see how they are doing. Loneliness can lead to depression and other mental health issues. Be aware of significant changes you may see in your team member’s personality or work product, because it may be a sign that a person is struggling.
- **Encourage online training:** This is a great time to encourage employees to sharpen their skills with online training. It is also a good distraction to focus on learning rather than worrying about other issues. Find online training and new learning opportunities to recommend to employees.
- **Check in with your EAP and Health Plan:** Check in with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to confirm their availability and to coordinate support for employees. Remind the staff that the EAP is there if they need support and can connect employees with behavioral health support, if needed. Also, connect with the organization’s health plan(s) to learn what they are offering to support plan members and pass that information onto employees. Be sure to include all relevant website links and phone numbers for both the EAP and health plan in communicating with employees.

Additional Resources:

Providers and Staff Self Care

<https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/mai-coc-grantees-online-community/1B - Virtual Meeting Breakout Session.pdf>

Pocket Card for COVID-19 Crisis - March 2020|

https://proqol.org/Home_Page.php

Working Remotely During COVID-19 - Your Mental Health and Well-being

<http://workplacentalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>

Staff Wellness Home Visitors

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/staff-wellness-home-visitors>