

Children In Lockdown

In the midst of these uncharted waters where we are trying to work from home, keep our jobs/businesses intact, homeschool our children and keep some sense of sanity in place, it is easy to forget that parents of minors are not only expected to maintain some sense of normalcy for their children, but also understand, decode and hold their emotional experience. Children don't have a direct access to their emotional language when they are in distress, even if your child is verbal and seemingly capable of explaining themselves, their ability to process and make sense of complex emotions is limited and congruent with their overall development. Here are some indications your child might be struggling with the lockdown.

Anger and irritability: Your children seem to have a short fuse, they display unexpected emotional outbursts over minor irritants, such as not being able to open a snack bag, or find their workbook, or the right color pencil. There is more fighting amongst siblings and they seem more likely to push back on discipline and are less patient.

Acting out: Children cannot always articulate their feelings, often times they are not even aware of their own emotional shifts, instead they show us with behavior. It is up to the adult to employ mindful patience and curiosity to comprehend the embedded message in the behavior. You might find that your child is more prone to accidents, tantrums, making messes, not listening and breaking basic house rules.

Academic struggles: Shifting from in class instruction to online, having significantly less contact with teachers and school staff on a daily basis, lack of interaction with peers and change of schedule plays a huge role in your child's ability to keep school work a priority. The reality and importance of schoolwork when the concrete presence of the actual school is missing is very hard for a child to integrate. Don't be surprised if you find your child skipping his/her zoom meetings, not turning in work, or not prioritizing school work all together. A straight A child may fall behind or display atypical disregard for academics. Learning requires strict conditioning, most of our children are conditioned to learn in very specific environments, changes require time for adaptation. Unsupervised online learning calls for a level of self-organization which many children are not developmentally ready for.

Sleep disturbance: Anxiety might manifest in disturbed sleep patterns, you might find your child falling out of his/her usual sleep schedule, going to sleep later, waking up in the middle of the night or even having nightmares.

Separation anxiety: Not wanting to leave the house, or feeling anxious when a family member leaves. Some children and toddlers might display regressive behavior, crying when you leave, being excessively clingy, you may even find some developmental regression in potty training, or speech. Older children may express worry about your health, they may ask difficult questions about the virus and mortality.

WHAT TO DO

Manage your expectations: Children are adjusting as much as you are, hold back on punitive behavior, try to breathe before you react. Accept that your children's academics may temporarily suffer, make peace with this temporary set back

Talk to your child: based on your child's developmental capacity, it is ok to talk to them about the pandemic, you can explain in basic terms about the virus and outline safety protocols like the importance of washing hands and keeping a distance from potential contaminants. Comfort your child, allow closer contact if it seems soothing, ask questions, and be open to adjusting your protocol based on needs.

Validate and share: instead of empty promises or forced positivity, acknowledge the situation, "yes many people are getting sick and it can be scary sometimes", "Yes, I too miss my friends and going places".

Offer solutions: try to help your child problem solve instead of getting angry at them or constantly offering solutions and reframes. Try to understand what they are needing by asking questions, help them find their own solutions, "what do you think you need right now?"

Cut yourself some slack: Try to not turn on yourself when you are struggling with parenting issues, be kind and patient with yourself, take breaks, let things go, don't take it personally, remember we are all feeling this on some level.