

# Families Can Shelter in Place Without Losing Their Minds

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Who knew how quickly COVID-19 would change all our lives? Almost all of us now are working, schooling, playing, eating, and sleeping in close proximity with our families and roommates. As a local counselor, I am seeing (through Telehealth, of course) an increase in individuals, couples, and families seeking help for anxiety, depression, and relationship issues brought on by too much of each other. You and your family can cope with this situation without going crazy. You can live with, labor with, learn with, and laugh with each other without losing it.

## **Talk About It—But Not Too Much**

Have some age-appropriate household conversations about the virus. Talk about how it feels to be living in such unprecedented times. Encourage children and teenagers to create art or journal about what they are feeling and thinking. And pay attention to what they are telling you. These conversations can help the whole family process what they are experiencing. Engage in dialogue about the issue in whatever ways work for your family. But talk about other things too. While some discerning conversations can make the virus seem less mysterious, too much conversation can breed anxiety.

## **Maintain As Much Normalcy As Possible**

Try to maintain the daily and weekly rhythms of devotional time, work/school schedules, meal times, household chores, play times, and sleep schedules just as you normally would. Sleep schedules are especially important. Your teens may want to stay up all night playing video games, but they will not do well, and neither will you, if every day starts to feel like Saturday. Stay in touch with life-giving friends through phone calls, texting, or FaceTime. If you regularly get together with certain people for accountability or support, look for virtual ways to continue to meet. In a time when there is so much upheaval, strive for as much consistency as you can.

## **Give Grace and Bend Some Rules**

At the same time, unprecedented times do sometimes call for desperate measures. The paragraph above may seem quite daunting to parents with more children, smaller children, or children with special needs. It's okay to bend a few of your own rules during this time. Giving your children or teenagers a bit more "screen time" may be just what you need to work in a nap, have an uninterrupted marital conversation, or help the kids fight boredom. Make a special effort to encourage each other and show gratitude. Overlook more minor annoyances. This is a difficult time for everyone in different ways. Use this season as a time to work on giving more grace to others.

### **Cultivate Healthy Coping**

This can be a time to develop healthy ways of coping with stress, and to teach your kids how to do so as well. Make a list of things that you can do, maybe things that you don't normally do, to keep your sanity during this time. Here are a few ideas to get you started: read that book that you have been planning to read (or several), learn a new game and play it with your family, start a journal, read, study deeply, or memorize a book or passage of Scripture, listen to a podcast, etc. Forced time together under the same roof can be either a blessing or a curse. Fight for the blessing in it. Look for what God may be wanting to do in you during this season, and encourage others in your household to do the same. It may just be that the Lord may use these days to strengthen and bring greater spiritual, emotional, mental, and, hopefully, physical health to you and yours.