

# THE ART of staying At Home

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50 TIPS TO HELP CREATE STABILITY AND FAMILY HARMONY  
DURING SOCIAL ISOLATION



RISE NI | NHSCT  
2020

Given the challenging times we are in, we need some ideas to help our children cope with the stress of isolation and social distancing.

Sometimes this may be manageable, however as the situation persists, we may need additional guidance and strategies to try at home.

It is important to remember for all of us as parents and carers -that anger; frustration, stress and agitation may be a child's way of telling us they are struggling with the situation they are in, it may be that they do not have the words or understanding to express this.

It is useful to reframe the question from, "What is wrong with him?" To "What is happening to our child, to make him feel and behave like this?"

By doing this allows us to understand and think about what we can do to help our children cope at this difficult time.

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If you have a child or children who are finding the current situation difficult -consider these tips. Hopefully you might find some of these useful to: (a) prevent/reduce your child's emotional and behavioural dysregulation and outbursts (b) help your child calm down and learn new ways to self-regulate and (c) enhance their confidence and resilience to cope with the challenges ahead.

These tips are in no particular order so you can dip in and out as you like.

At the back of this document there are resources for the whole family to use.

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### **Useful links**

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)

[www.barnardos.org](http://www.barnardos.org)

[familysupportni.gov.uk](http://familysupportni.gov.uk)

[Actionforhappiness.org](http://Actionforhappiness.org)

[www.playboard.org](http://www.playboard.org)

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

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We hope you find this resource useful and that it helps you build on your ideas and strategies that you maybe already using.

**TIP1** • *Routine, Routine, Routine*. Many Kids thrive in homes that provide routines, consistency and structure. Especially now and more than ever, these kids need this to feel more secure in their surroundings. For them, a more structured and predictable approach to routines works better. Waking up time, eating meals, going for exercise, doing schoolwork and bed times should all occur at about the same time every day, with few surprises to upset your child.

**TIP2** • Remove your child from the stressful situation should it arise. Lead him/her to a quiet area if you have one.

**TIP3** • Filter and manage exposure to media and news outlets regarding the current crisis. Children like all of us can become distressed even traumatized by news and events that are frightening - especially when not in their control. Consider how you might talk about what is happening. This naturally also means access to social media and particularly the scourge of fake news.

**TIP4** • Establish a healthy **Sleep Routine**. On average children need about 9-11 hours' of sleep. Try to keep bedtimes and wake up times consistent and try to keep these times (particularly weekdays) similar to when they were at school. Make changes to their sleeping environment to aid sleep i.e. decluttering the room, make it quiet and comfortable. Consider making an alternative play area in a different room if possible.



Get sunlight (whatever there is some!) during day for at least 30mins and avoid napping during the day. Have a last hour wind-down period -so turn off TV, run a bath, listen to music, read a book etc.

Encourage your child not to wear bed clothes once they get up. On natural holiday periods you can consider relaxing the routine and revert to what you would normally do.

*Sleep is a time for strengthening our immune system, growing and repairing our cells, processing what happened that day. Sleep helps integrate memories and what we have learnt and helps us to maintain a state of self-regulation.*

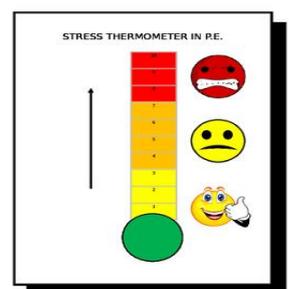
*Sleep is important to all of us (now more than ever) so try these ideas for the whole family.*

**TIP5.** *Teach your child how to self-regulate. Ask them to take several deep breaths and count to ten. This breathing and counting technique will help your child to react not with impulsivity and anger, but in a calm way.*

*Deep breathing is an easy technique children can use to defuse anger and help them to self-regulate. Show your child what to do by placing your hand on your chest and getting him/her to do the same while taking in two deep breaths. The hand on the chest serves as a handy visual cue that you can use to remind your child to take a step back from what's bothering them: just do it if you see your child start to get frustrated.*

*Another useful self-regulation technique is to show your child (or indeed use yourself) the butterfly technique. Put your hands on your opposing shoulders and slowly and alternatively tap on each shoulder. Keep the pace to that similar of your heartbeat. Do these for a few minutes or for as long as it helps to self-regulate.*

**TIP6.** *Check your own stress levels, because kids are often emotional barometers for their parents.*



**TIP7.** *Be positive! Kids pick up negative thoughts very quickly and will react and respond to them.*

**TIP8.** *If your child is upsetting their sibling, find out why, and then ask them to apologize and discuss with them a better way they can manage later.*

*Brainstorm solutions to problems. If your child doesn't have the verbal skills to assert him/herself in a non-aggressive way, then teach it. Children love "pretend play" and you can use that to teach them how to react to the things that tend to trigger their rage. Role-play a situation that would normally have your child going into meltdown and work out how he/she can resolve it.*

**TIP9.** *Be a good role model. Before you can calm down your child's anxiety, you must first learn to calm down your own first. Lead by example, because you can't put out a fire with another fire. Use your own supports and resources to self-regulate.*



**TIP10.** *The repeated act of chewing and sucking provides agitated kids the necessary oral sensory input that helps them relax. This is why some kids will chew the inside of their mouth when they feel agitated. Replace this habit by giving agitated kids food that requires repeated chewing, such as celery, carrots, lettuce and other crunchy vegetables. Kids can also chew gum to help them settle down. You can also give the youngster a smoothie to drink using a straw.*

**TIP11.** *Create a calming home environment. Some Kids have difficulty remaining calm in a hectic or agitated environment. Clearing the clutter and*

*taking a "less is more" approach to decorating can reduce the sensory overload on kids. The youngster's bedroom especially should be free of clutter. Use plastic bins to organize and store all those precious little plastic treasures (that we adults commonly refer to as "junk") and small toys. Open the curtains to provide natural lighting and open windows for fresh air. Keep posters and wall hangings to a minimum. Paint or redecorate the youngster's bedroom in calming muted colours instead of bright primary colours.*

**TIP12.** *Consider having your child wear a weighted vest/belt. These therapeutic weight devices are designed to help agitated kids feel grounded by their core and thus more secure. Weighted belts help with the child's balance and motor skills. The deep pressure stimulates the child's sense of positioning to help them refocus and reorganize themselves when they are in an agitated state. (If you think your child may benefit from this you should discuss this with an occupational therapist)*

**TIP13.** *Allow your child to sit in a beanbag chair if they are feeling agitated. The feeling of being hugged helps to relax your youngster when he/she is too agitated to receive the actual hug.*

**TIP14.** *Allow your child to play in a (safe, supervised) warm bath or dig in a sandbox. Agitated kids experience a calming effect from the variety of textures.*

**TIP15.** *If your child is angry about a privilege being taken away, not getting to have dessert, having to turn off the television, having to go to bed, or simply is having a very bad day, don't be harsh. Be gentle, caring and understanding. Try to reason with them. Ask what he/she wants, if they had their way. Do they demand to stay up another half-hour? Make a bargain that they may stay up for ten minutes, but that you would read them a story at bedtime. Go halfway and give them a deal. If they still are being difficult, or if you simply can't let them stay up, tell them that they have*

*to go to bed, and give them the reasons why.*

**TIP16.** *Play and have fun. Consider allowing specific time each day if possible, e.g. 15 minutes a day to engage in non-competitive and non-directive play. Play alongside, follow their lead, show interest and avoid too many questions. Just use comments like “you look like your enjoying this” or “I like the way you are sharing with your sister.” This may help with social skills, building confidence and resilience.*

**TIP17.** *As mentioned elsewhere, if at all possible, find a space in the house to designate as a relaxation or a chill zone. It does not have to be a large space but it does need to be away from high activity areas. This little corner (or even a portion of a walk-in closet) can have a beanbag or a chair and a few reading books, colouring books or other quiet time activities. Encourage your youngster to go to this space when they become angry or agitated, but never make this a place of punishment. This special spot in the house is a positive place where they can go to settle down, sort things out or just hang out when they need to be alone.*



**TIP18.** *If your child is upset or angry about something related to one of his/her toys or possessions, ask to see the toy and try to fix it. In the worst-case-scenario, the toy will be permanently broken and you may consider replacing it or you may want to “put it away so you can fix it properly later”.*

**TIP19.** *Allow your child to use his/her energy in a fun and safe way through jumping, spinning, running, climbing, swinging or other physical activities. Allow him/her to play-wrestle with pillows or other soft objects since agitated children seek sensations inherent to the contact from tackling, bumping and crashing.*

**TIP20.** *Give your child an alternative to a tantrum. If he/she is able to identify that they are losing control, or if you notice it yourself, you can suggest another activity. You can often help a child calm down with a little distraction or redirection.*

**TIP21.** *Give your child a mini-massage. Touch is very important to some kids. Massaging their temples, giving a shoulder rub or lightly running your fingers through their hair may calm him quickly. Massaging releases the stress busting hormone oxytocin, which helps us to remain calm and settled.*

**TIP22.** *Help your child to work out what they are feeling. After they have calmed down from a tantrum, gently talk them through it. Ask what was bothering them and why: e.g., “Did you think I wasn’t listening to you?” Like adults, young children have a variety of feelings. They need to be taught how to label and manage those feelings, especially anger. In order to do this, your child needs an emotion vocabulary – and you can provide that by asking questions such as, “Were you angry?” ... “Did you feel sad?” ... “Were you frightened?”*

**TIP23.** *Help your child to identify the warning signs leading up to a tantrum. Older children can even make a list of these warning signs and post them in a visible location. If your child is aware of what these signs are, they can then practice the breathing and counting techniques.*

**TIP24.** *Hold the highest vision for your kids and try not to label them as difficult or nonconformist.*

**TIP25.** *Keep them away (were possible) from caffeinated drinks and anything with added preservatives, colouring and sugar.*

**TIP26.** *Have clear household rules. Sometimes young children need it clarified so they can see how their behaviour relates back to their parents or carers pulling them up all the time. Your child reacts aggressively when you*

*try to enforce rules and limits – so he/she gets told off. Explain in simple terms the connection between those two events: “Jack, being told off makes you upset. But if you keep hitting and biting, I’m going to keep telling you off. If you stop doing it then I won’t tell you off.”*

**TIP27.** *Make sure your child is not unwell or hurt. Is physical pain/illness upsetting him/her? If so, and he/she is hurt, take care of his wound, or bump on the head, etc. If the youngster is still upset, there may be some anger towards the person or thing that caused the injury.*

### Family Rules

Be Thankful

Help Each Other

Know You Are Loved

Pay with Hugs and Kisses

Try New Things

Be Happy

Show Compassion

Respect One Another

Laugh Out Loud

**TIP28.** *Make the effort to really listen to your child when you teach new ways to cope with situations. Many children react negatively to authority, so making time for them on their own will help to build their confidence.*

**TIP29.** *Manage your own feelings. If you go off like a rocket at the slightest thing, it’s likely your child will too. Your children learn to manage their anger by watching the way you manage your own (this is modelling). It’s a sobering thought, but anger habits can be learned. The irony is that aggression can often be a major trigger for parents to explode, but try not to let your own anger build up. Deal with it as soon as possible, using a calm voice to express how you feel rather than yelling. It’ll have way more impact and just as you expect your child to apologize for bad behaviour, get into the habit of apologizing to him/her if you lose your temper inappropriately.*



*If your child’s behaviour is disrupting your home and putting family members or others at risk and he/she reacts explosively to even the mildest discipline techniques, contact your local community support services for guidance and advice.*

**TIP30.** *Many children do not know how to calm down or even what “calm”*

*feels like. Explain it to them and discuss it frequently.*

**TIP31.** *Don't tolerate aggressive behaviour, in any way, shape or form. As with every other aspect of parenting, consistency is paramount. The only way to stop your child from being aggressive is to make a house rule that aggression is not acceptable.*

**TIP32.** *Practice what to say. Offer your child verbal alternatives to their anger: e.g "Maybe you could have said this "or "Why don't you try that next time?" If trouble is brewing, remind your child by saying, "Use your words, Tom" – and be sure to praise him when he does, perhaps via a Reward Chart with a happy face for every day he doesn't hit or by saying to him something like, "I'm so happy you didn't lose your temper when Alex was playing with your toys."*

**TIP33.** *Put together a "Boredom Box" that provides creative outlets for your youngster. Fill this box or plastic storage bin with paint sets, colouring books, crossword puzzles, modelling clay, jewellery making kits and other artistic areas of interest. Some children get bored easily and their fast spinning minds need extra stimulation. In the absence of nothing better to do, kids will lean on their own devices, and you don't want them doing that.*

**TIP34.** *Reassure your child that you love them and that things will be ok, even though you recognize they can be 'highly spirited'; they will need this now more than ever.*

**TIP35.** *Teach your child what calm behaviour looks like by showing him you can be calm too.*

**TIP36.** *Allow your child to perform some heavy chores such as vacuuming, moving objects or cleaning windows and cabinet doors. This helps him/her focus on completing a necessary task while using his/her energy in a constructive way. Heavy chores or intense exercise allow kids to experience*

*sensory input to different muscles and joints.*

**TIP37.** *Eliminate clutter in the child's environment to help structure and focus his/her energies and to prevent repeated outbursts. Environments that are cramped may cause stress (in most case this can't be helped), so having your daily exercise is extremely important. Do not speak in an agitated or overexcited voice to an agitated youngster since this aggravates the problem. Keep your voice calm while instructing him/her in concise sentences on what he/she can do to calm down. Dim the lights so the agitated youngster receives less sensory input from surroundings.*

**TIP38.** *Take your child for a walk (were possible!). Not only does walking burn off toxic energy, the repetitive thump, thump, thump of feet hitting pavement brings the mind back into focus.*

**TIP39.** *Taking a mini-vacation with guided imagery. Guided imagery is a powerful relaxation tool for kids that pull their focus to positive thoughts, all the while encouraging creativity in your youngster.*

**TIP40.** *Encourage your child to maintain regular activity. Use the worksheets at the back of this resource to make this more enjoyable and productive.*

**TIP41.** *Teach/show your child how to empathize. Some kids may pay little attention to the effect their behaviour might have on everyone else. If your child hits, bites or kicks, get down to his/her level and calmly ask him/her how they would feel if someone did that to him/her. Prompt your child to give it some thought by saying things like, "If your sister kicked you like that it would hurt you and make you cry."*

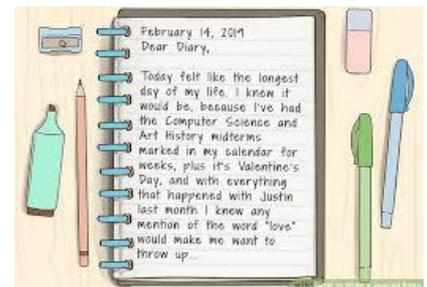
**TIP42.** *Give your child lots of opportunities to try new things such as*

*decorating, gardening, and helping with reorganising rooms etc. as it helps to release physical and emotional energy.*

**TIP43.** *Consider aromatherapy! Lavender scents apparently have a calming effect.*

**TIP44.** *Give your child a creative outlet through playing with watercolour paints, drawing or colouring or moulding with clay or play dough. You could use the opportunity to show them new skills i.e. cooking and baking.*

**TIP45.** *Try journaling. For the child who is old enough to write, journaling is an excellent way to untangle frazzled minds and get things off their chest. This technique allows children to spill their internal stresses outside themselves and onto paper. Develop a daily habit of having your child write a page or two, depending on their age, about anything that comes to mind. They can write "I hate school, the dog just drooled on the and baby's crying is driving me crazy..." - whatever comes to mind. Eventually, they will get the hang of what is going on inside them. Then rumple or tear the paper up and throw it away. These private internal thoughts are not for you or anyone else to read, ever. Please respect their privacy and let them know they can write anything down without fear of reprimand.*



**TIP46.** *Turn it around, and learn from our children's the gifts of honesty, perseverance, patience and problem-solving. Tell them this!*

**TIP47.** *Unplug! Children who see aggressive or violent behaviour played out on the TV screen or in computer games tend to be more aggressive when they play. If your child is consistently aggressive or agitated, limit their exposure to it. If your child does see it on TV, explain that hitting isn't a nice way to act and doesn't solve problems. Reinforce the message by*

*choosing storybooks and TV shows that promote positive interactions and kindness.*

**TIP48.** *Play/Use calming and soothing music at different times in the day.*

**TIP49.** *Sometimes it is best to leave a child to work through a tantrum or an emotional outburst by removing yourself from the situation. However, you should always ensure that your child is in a safe environment and not able to hurt themselves.*

*It is hard to communicate with your child during this time, so avoid questioning/blaming and just acknowledge and comment on how they are feeling e.g. “you seem very upset “or “I’m sorry you’re so angry” this is more likely to defuse and not inflame situation. You can ask later what happened and maybe problem solve for the next time if it happens.*

**TIP50.** *Watch their diet. Some parents find that reducing or eliminating certain foods from the diet goes a long way in calming their child. If your child is a fussy eater, you will need to supplement the diet to make sure your child has the fuels needed for their body to function well.*

*Starting the day out with a healthy breakfast balanced with proteins, fats and carbohydrates is important. Sugar cereals are quick and convenient but should not be used as a breakfast mainstay. Fruit juices are high in calories and sugar and not recommended. Instead of juice or sodas, get in the habit of offering plain old H<sub>2</sub>O. With plenty of bottled waters that offer fruit flavours and vitamin enhancements, getting your kids hydrated is easier now than ever before.*

## *Want a bit more?*

### *Self-Regulation for kids*

*Stop, Breathe & Think Kids App*

*Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame App*

*[www.nutureandthriveblog.com](http://www.nutureandthriveblog.com)*

### *Guided imagery*

*[www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)*

*[www.greenchildmagazine.com](http://www.greenchildmagazine.com)*

### *Help with sleeping*

*[www.sleepscotland.org](http://www.sleepscotland.org)*

*[www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)*

### *Weighted vest and clothing*

*[www.sensorydirect.com](http://www.sensorydirect.com)*

*[www.harkla.com](http://www.harkla.com)*