

Parenting During an Ongoing Pandemic: Parents Council of Washington Webinar

Speakers: Dr. Rob Evans and Dr. Michael Thompson

Some general thoughts

This is an unprecedented crisis, but one that calls for going back to fundamentals of coping and parenting.

There is increasingly more stress among parents about how to parent children. Parenting children is not new and has not required expert advice and opinion in the past. However, there are increasingly pressing concerns on parents (and children) which complicate what has typically been an uncomplicated process. The rate of change is increasing and that produces stress and unrest. Choice, too, has exploded and with choice comes freedom but also anxiety.

Being a parent is a lot of work and much of the work is not a lot of fun. We love our children and we want to be with them---but not all the time!

Remember!

You are not home schooling. You are not engaged in teaching.

These are things that people sign up for, train for, and have systems in place for implementing.

What is happening is a grand experiment in distance learning from home and in this grand experiment everyone is doing the best they can.

How can I get my child to do more assignments?

You are not your child's teacher. You're not. Don't try to replicate it.

Teachers have devotion and distance with their students, but as a parent you only have devotion so you are already in a challenging place.

Go easy with the "school day" and be okay with negotiating (the number of assignments completed, the amount of time spent on school, how, when, where assignments are completed, etc...)

How can I get my child to focus like they used to?

Short answer, you probably won't. This is not school. This is not their typical environment. You need to reset your expectations to meet the situation. Not only does the child have more trouble focusing, now they also have a parent who is projecting all of their frustration at them.

Will my child be traumatized by situation?

Most likely not, despite what news outlets say.

As mental health professionals, the presenters do not believe that there will be an epidemic of poor mental health in children in the coming months.

Expect some days of sadness and some days of real tantrums. This is to be expected. When those days and moments occur, accept them for what they are and resist projecting into the future or worrying about your child's overall mental health.

Will my child's social life be damaged by this?

Probably not.

Older kids are finding lots of ways to stay connected to friends (even if it means increased screen time).

For younger kids it is more important that their relationship with you and with their teacher is maintained and strong. Adults are still their primary attachments and feeling secure in these relationships will set them up for success when they are back on-campus.

My younger kids (6-8 years old) are not really connecting on the screen, should I be worried?

No, not really. These kids are not really very verbal or social with each other all the time even when on campus. They play together, but they don't necessarily sit around and talk together. The Zoom class or meeting format may not really work and that's okay.

Pay more attention to how and whether your kids are connecting with people in general. How is your child doing at home? With you? With siblings? With their teacher?

My child often wants to spend their free time alone, should I be worried?

What kids are missing right now is social connection (if they are older) and play (if they are younger).

So if your child is spending time on screens interacting with others or playing in their rooms using their imaginations, then that is really what they need and is fine.

But all of this with limits. Have an end time for screens before bed and keep some guidelines and limits around screen use. Ask to play with your kids when you can, but solo play is okay too.

Will my child be able to go back to regular screen time limits?

Yes, because this is not what they want, but rather what they are using to fill what they want and need. They want social connection and distraction. They won't need that once they are back on campus and able to interact more with friends, sports, and other activities.

How can I structure my summer?

The truth is, the presenters are mental health professionals and do not have knowledge about summer planning. In addition, it is hard to predict and hard to plan for each particular family.

What do I do with sadness and anger from kids?

Acknowledge it, feel it, and bear it. Say, "Of course you are angry. This was not what I expected or wanted either. We need a way to cope with this."

Avoid trying to cheer a child up. Avoid engaging in boosterism. Instead, accept how they feel and sit with it. Say, "Tell me about that feeling? How can I help?"

Resist putting your sadness and anger on them. When something goes wrong, we tend to think if we are upset our children must be more upset. This is often not true. It is usually the parents who are more upset. Don't assume your child's feelings are big even when they name them.

What do I do if my child expresses fear?

Listen to what their fear is and avoid putting your fear on them.

Find out more: “What made you ask? What do you know? What do you want to know?”

You might need to let your child have that feeling and be okay with the fact that you can’t fix it or make it better.

What do I do if I have a teacher who has unrealistic expectations?

Contact the teacher! Keep your feelings in check so you can really just communicate. There may also be a disconnect between your communication and the expectations that can be easily rectified with a conversation.

What about when we go back? My kid is doing well now. What will they be like then?

Deal with that when it comes. Take this a day at a time and manage the moment for now.

What about when I lose my temper?

Be easy on yourself. Children do not expect perfection from their parents, so don’t expect it from yourself.

You can also model taking a time out. That is what you need so model doing that. Walk away. Get control of yourself. Process the situation when you can.

Also, it is okay to need a break or need time for your own work. And it is okay to tell kids that.

We have lots of kids who have never had to meet the challenges of entertaining themselves and now that is what we need more than ever. It is a good thing for this to happen. Resist feeling guilty when you need to work or have space and you need your child to amuse themselves. This is a skill kids need to learn and it will serve them well.

How can I get my kid to engage to “free time” activities like reading?

Read to them. Reframe it as a family activity. Make it a game or a challenge. Have fun as a family.

Contact the NPS Counselors

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