

# The Parents Corner

## ☞ We're in Your Corner ☞

If you are feeling exhausted, afraid, overwhelmed, or you're on an emotional roller coaster—join the club! **None of what we are experiencing right now is normal, and you don't have to pretend it is to make anyone feel better.** We are all going through a really weird, unexpected time. And not being able to predict what will happen will shake us and make us more irritable. That is normal! Maybe it would help to put our feelings and reactions into a visual context. Picture an empty water glass in front of you, and everything that feels like a “bummer” fills the cup with some water every morning. You are used to life one way, but now you can't play with friends (*cup fills*), and you can't play on your sports teams (*cup fills*), and you can't go to school (*cup fills*), and you can't, can't, can't (*cup fills almost to the top*). By the time something happens that you think might not be a big deal, your water cup has only a fraction of open space left at the top, and adding even an ounce of water makes the cup spill over. We call that the “window of tolerance”. The reaction is big and doesn't fit the size of the problem, but it is a normal response: It is regressing or unraveling due to this traumatic experience. It can be extremely frustrating for us parents when that happens with our kids.

Whether said out loud or not, your child may feel like they're in danger. Children worry about getting sick themselves or about people dying. Our kids pick up on our stress, and it makes them feel less safe. We engage in power struggles over schoolwork, because we didn't sign up to work, parent, and teach all at once, especially with no warning to prepare. Our routines have been majorly disrupted, and our usual support systems that we find through friends aren't available like they were a few weeks ago. It feels like everything is off-limits and off-balance. So what can help? Expect regression, expect behaviors, expect stress to happen. That way, you can **make a plan for how to ease the impacts of the reactions.**

What is difficult for our children to digest is often the same for us. Life right now is hard...on everyone. Find a plan that works for you and do what feels right for you and yours—you know best! Here's one idea that may help:

1. **Name Your Feeling.** Talk about feelings. Yours, theirs, everyone's. Naming feelings makes them less powerful. Feelings aren't dangerous, they are just visitors letting us know we don't like something, want to change something, or need something.
2. **Model Coping Strategies.** Build in family habits that help everyone work through big emotions—coping skills are good for all of us. We may not have a lot of control right now, but we can increase our child's inner resources. Your reaction matters, and modeling ways to cope with big feelings can help our kids practice and learn.
3. **Empathize.** Empathy can create emotional safety so your child feels comfortable sharing their feelings. Sometimes we will lose patience with our kids—a break, a hug, and an “I love you” after something happens is extremely powerful. Think about it even from the perspective of a fight with someone as an adult. We feel embarrassed or wounded. We want to know we are still loved.
4. **Keep things predictable.** Much of the anxiety we're feeling right now comes from the uncertainty. Creating some certainty, whether through a routine or some kind of daily structure, can help the anxious moments in your head when you don't know what to expect. Create a new normal. ***And take it one day at a time!***

*~If you continue to have concerns, contact your school counselor to schedule a video conference appointment— they're full of ideas, and are always in your corner!~*