

Personal Tool – Support for Parents

This tool was created by one of our senior clinical team members from our Melbourne Office, Kate McPhee, Psychologist & Clinical Associate Coordinator at AccessEAP.

Looking back over the past 25 years it could be agreed that Australia and New Zealand have had extraordinary economic growth and for the majority of the population enormous freedom of choice. For those in the middle age group, there have most likely been some highlights over the past 25 years which has included travel both domestic and international, partying, meeting new people and shaking their hands and even hugging them and most likely a belief that decisions were free to be made.

But that was then, and this is now. Young people in 2020 have had this world view crushed and their liberties revoked in a way that is startling. This will then of course impact on their world view, their mental health and their motivation to enjoy their schoolwork, part-time work and their recreational pursuits. This is of course dependent on if any of these activities are occurring in the places that you live. Their mental health will, therefore, be impacted by these changes. Here's a few ideas to talk to them about how you can support them moving forward.

How do we support our children and young people to gain and maintain their mental health? The short answer is talking so that they can listen and listening so that they can talk. There is a wonderful resource ["How to talk so kids will listen"](#).

The overview of the book is that, as parents strive for:

- **Accepting and acknowledging** your child's feelings, whatever they are. The way that kids feels affects their behaviour which can also have a large impact on their mood. This starts the listening process.
- **Reduce punishment.** In COVID-19, all members of the public are stressed. When stressed, many people reduce to picking at partners and children, micromanaging staff and the household and punishing others for minor offences. Instead of punishing the suggestion is to encourage cooperation and learn some negotiation skills. Viewing bad behaviour as a character flaw only increases tension – perhaps view it as a learning opportunity.
- **Encouraging autonomy and self-confidence.** This means that household chores, agreed activities and approaches to work are self-driven. Spend time talking about the jobs and general family work and avoid gatekeeping. This also means encouraging children and young people to make and pack their own lunches (and problem-solving when forgetting it), plan their approach to homework and talking to you about how they are doing it and managing their own time. Set them up for success with the tools (diaries, watches and technology) but avoid cocooning them in their approach to life.

Our suggestion today is that there will inevitably be changes because of the pandemic. The way that we parent, partner and support our families will inevitably change as well. To assist you with that change, we have put some tips together for working parents to help them manage the stress of running a household, attending paid work and adapting to the new world.



Get a Team

You don't have to do it alone. Read again. Get a support crew. Think creatively about who may make up your team; it may include a partner, extended family, friends in a similar boat or paid support. Establish your team and then as with all teams, be clear about your goals and roles and work together to make it feel like you've shared the load.

A Flexible Parent is a Resilient Parent

As a parent, you will appreciate that everything will not always go according to plan. When things happen that are unexpected or in a way that was not anticipated, adjust plans and deal with things as they are, don't get hung up on how they "should" have been. This is going to be difficult from now on as invariably the big, small and medium plans have been changed. Get some professional support if you feel stuck or unable to find your resilience.

Focus on quality, not quantity, of time with kids

Kids are different, so ask your kids what's most important to them when it comes to spending time with you. Listening to your kids will help you prioritise and improve your time with them. It's also important that recreation activities with your kids include things you really like doing; this way you genuinely all have fun and enjoy your time together.

Make time for your spouse/ self—not just for your kids

A study by the UCLA Sloan Centre on Everyday Lives and Families, found that while parents were spending more time with kids, they were spending far less time with each other—three fewer hours per week since 1975, according to one survey. This trend impacts the parental relationship, which in turn has major implications on parenting. Book in a joint massage together, set a regular date night (and stick to it), schedule in exercise or a walk together. You may also need time in your own to reflect and recharge.

Wherever you are, be there—be present

Practising mindfulness doesn't just lead to decreased stress and increased pleasure in parenting, but it also brings profound benefits to kids.

Simply put, this is about being at work when you're at work and being at home when you're at home—which breaks out into specific parenting skills, like listening with full attention; nonjudgmentally accepting yourself and the people in your life; and cultivating compassion for yourself, your partner, and your child.

Give yourself a little credit—and say “thanks” to your spouse/ supports

Parents need to appreciate and value what they are doing—not beat themselves up over what they can't do! Also try giving other people some credit as well, especially your partner because it is very, very easy for working parents to take each other for granted.

Remember, as your EAP, we are here to support you whatever the nature of your concerns. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

