

HOW TO SURVIVE A DIFFICULT DAY AS A PANDEMIC PARENT

3 tips to help make it through the long and challenging days while sheltering-in-place with children.



Lead with Love and Validation

Even if your children appear to be purposefully attempting to provoke you, they are doing it because there is some other issue going on for them. It may be that they are tired, hungry, or scared — but not able to identify or describe their feelings.

When people feel vulnerable, we sometimes act in an opposite manner, getting loud and aggressive to "protect" ourselves from the vulnerable feelings. Meeting difficult behavior with love can help kids move through that anger to get to underlying vulnerability. It could bring you closer together instead of leading to more arguing.

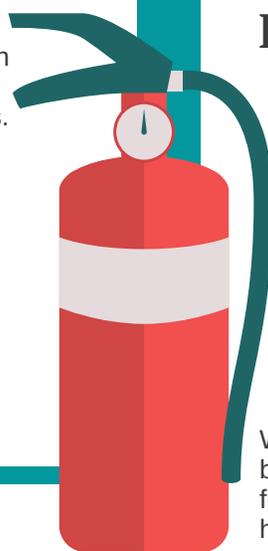
How: You can still set limits on behavior while validating feelings. For example: *You have big feelings right now and they are valid, but it's not okay to hit your brother. What do your mad feelings want me to know right now? What are your feelings trying to say?*

Know When to Hold 'em and When to Fold 'em

If an expectation that you have set for your child — like completing a math worksheet, eating a vegetable, putting on underwear, etc. — is leading to repeated conflict and tension, consider dropping that expectation at least for a few minutes, a few hours, or a few days.

How: Return to it when you have had a chance to buffer up your own resources and ideas for addressing that expectation in a different way.

Frequent arguing and tension between you and your child won't help that expectation be met, and it will deplete both of your resources for other tasks. If you change the script and remove the conflict, even temporarily, you can change the outcome.



Forgive and Move On

While you can't undo difficult moments, the good news is that you don't need to. You can practice forgiving and moving on. These are hard times and difficulties are going to happen. Probably multiple times a day.

How: When you are struggling to keep your calm, take space, even if it is just for 5 minutes in a locked bathroom. Take a few deep breaths, forgive yourself, your partner, and/or your kids for struggling, and let go of the hard things that just happened — they are beyond your control.

What you will do when you "move on" from your break *is* in your control. "Moving on" isn't forgetting. It's allowing yourself to start fresh and have a different outcome.

Bonus Tip!

All of this applies to dealing with your feelings and adult relationships too. Meet your feelings with validation, and lead with love for yourself. It is reasonable that you are having a hard time managing this. It is hard. It is temporary.

Survive this moment, and then the next, and then the next. It's a lot easier to survive if we remove expectations and know that we are going to struggle. And if we just make it to the next moment, something will inevitably change.

By Erin Hunter, Ph.D., Director of University Center for the Child and Family (UCCF), Mary A. Rackham Institute;
Edited and designed by Stephanie Ariganello, marketing and communications



MARY A. RACKHAM INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR THE CHILD AND FAMILY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Visit mari.umich.edu/ucf to learn more about UCCF.