

Parents,

As adults, the conditions surrounding COVID-19 are almost incomprehensible, so it stands to reason that talking with children about the pandemic can be challenging. Helping them understand why schools, churches, and businesses are closed, extra-curricular activities are cancelled, and we are all essentially on house-arrest— isolated from the lives we knew a week ago. As a therapist and child development specialist, and your children’s minister, I wanted to offer tips for normalizing this anything-but-normal time in global history. This list is not exhaustive, but I pray it offers a starting point for learning to parent during pandemonium.

1. First, **limit—if not eliminate—access to the news** for you children. Turn off televised newscasts, monitor commercial television, restrict social media, keep newspapers out of reach. Do your best to limit your child’s exposure to all things pandemic—including *discussing the pandemic if little ears are listening*. This helps remove unnecessary panic from your child. (For your mental health, I recommend reducing your exposure to the news too. Establish a few daily check-in times to stay current, and choose instead to focus your mental energy on what you can control.) And, of course, wash your hands. ☺

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things.” Philippians 4:8

2. Secondly, try to **establish a new routine** for your family as quickly as possible. If your work, school, or childcare has changed, reestablishing a “new normal” will reduce the chaos felt in your home. Homeschooling? Set up a dedicated space, time, and rhythm. Maintain morning and bedtime rituals. Be intentional about outdoor play, creative play, and screen time. Church moved online? Watch services together as a family and be mindful about making worship, prayer, and discipleship a priority.
3. Third, **stay home**. In the communal effort to contain the spread of the virus, it’s necessary that we each do our part *before* the worst-case-scenario is felt in our area. Choose to see this downtime as a blessing. Allow it to be a time of recalibration for your family, trusting that God will bring good from the situation. Protected time with our loved ones (though a bit unnerving at times) is undervalued in a world where tomorrow is never guaranteed. Reinstate family dinners, have movie and game nights— seize opportunities to remove yourselves from the routine hustle and bustle of life, and instead *Be Still*.
4. Fourth, **focus on stewardship**. Don’t let your kids see you unreasonably stockpile or panic buy, or lose your patience with an overworked store clerk because there’s no TP or ground beef. This “new normal” will require us all to exercise stewardship and generosity in a way we’re not accustomed— careful meal planning, budgeting, rationing our resources, seeking sustainable ways to manage our households. Amidst the hardships, look for ways to model how we uplift others and live open-fisted.
5. Finally, understand that you **set the tone** in your home. Finances will be stretched, patience levels will be tested, and cabin fever will set in. Despite these things, model the memories you want your child to have when they recall this season of their lives. Have conversations that are honest, but developmentally appropriate. Be a source of reason and stability. If your child is scared or nervous, remind them where our peace comes from, redirecting their worries and leading them in prayer.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

In the love and peace of Christ,
Dr. Nichole Huff
NUMC Director of Children and Family Ministries