

A-Z GUIDE

FOR PARENTS JUGGLING WORK, FAMILY (AND EVERYTHING ELSE!) DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Created by Tanya Dannock and Rachel Haywood



'This perfectly practical, digestible handbook is a great support to parents through the Coronavirus crisis'

- Dr Justin Coulson, one of Australia's most trusted parenting experts



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A note to parents and carers

To say we are living in challenging times is an understatement. As we try to adjust to a very different way of life, we are committed to supporting businesses and individuals find innovative and tailored flexible work solutions.

On top of the usual flexible work challenges, the coronavirus crisis and associated self-isolation is presenting a whole new level of stress and complexity - most especially for parents working from home whilst educating and caring for their children.

This A-Z guide has been developed as a free resource by Tanya Dannock, a qualified trainer, parenting advocate, birth assistant, and managing director of AdaptAbility@Work, a consultancy dedicated to helping parents juggle work and family and everything else! She is also the author of another ebook: 'A Parent's first ABC: What you need to know as a new parent.'

We hope you find the information useful and would love to hear your feedback. In the meantime, please feel free to check out the myriad services offered by the FlexAgility Group and AdaptAbility and let us know if we can support you further in any way.

Good luck + #stayhome!



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My message to you

Getting through these very challenging and uncertain times will require a flexible, resilient and adaptable mindset as you adjust to a new way of working and living. This is not a time for business as usual. It's a time to reassess, to be brave and to make decisions that best support you and your family.

If there's one thing this pandemic is going to teach us, it's what we truly value...and also what we don't. Some people may have the luxury of using this time of enforced isolation to reflect and maybe recalibrate their life - lucky them! But the reality for many parents with babies, toddlers and school-aged children is likely to be quite different.

On top of their already exhaustive (and exhausting!) to-do lists, parents around the world are trying to adjust to a new normal: being house bound while working from home and caring for children and/or overseeing school work. It goes without saying that this is likely to be a very stressful period for parents and children alike.

While everyone will find their own way to make things work, there are some useful principles that can help guide your decision-making:

- Look after yourself so you can look after others
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Be open and flexible to new ways of doing business (family and work), and
- Be brave

And it's worth keeping an eye out for some silver linings too. There's potential for this time to be a massive experiment - an opportunity to showcase the many positive work, health, social and environmental benefits associated with working more flexibly.

This guide is intended to offer some useful tips and insights to help you adjust to our new self-isolated way of living. It will be regularly updated with new information and interesting links to news and other articles as they emerge over the next few weeks and months. And please note, the information and advice in this guide is intended to complement, not replace, any Commonwealth or state government advice.

Go gently with one another and stay brave,

Tanya Dannoek



ADDRESS your stress

Remember the briefing on the plane before take-off, where we're reminded that in the event of an emergency we need to remain as calm as possible and put on our own oxygen mask first in order to help others? Well now is that time!

For parents, the 'oxygen mask' includes plenty of rest, eating nutritious food, staying hydrated, exercising (preferably in sunshine if you can), and having some 'time out' (even if it's 10 minutes in your bedroom with the door closed).

Ideally, it also includes mindfulness practices such as meditation or yoga. (YouTube has plenty of online videos for both adults and children).

If you can't get your usual dose of daily exercise outside, remember that singing and dancing are great stress relievers. Take a video of the family and share them with close friends. You'll not only make their day, but you'll give them a boost of feel good endorphins (which are also good for supporting the immune system!) And if it all gets too much, turn up the music, and take it in turns (kids too!) to let out a big scream. But let your neighbours know beforehand!

The Australian Government's Raising Children website has lots of good stress management tips for parents here.

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BE PRESENT for your children

Now, more than ever, your children need you to be attentive to them.

Like us, children and teenagers are likely to be scared, fearful and anxious. Whether they hear you talk, or simply sense your stress, they often know when something is not right. Don't pretend everything is OK because that will confuse them further. To the extent that is age appropriate, explain the situation. Let them know that we are all having to self-isolate for everyone's health and wellbeing. But remember to engage with family and friends online or by phone so children can be reassured that the people they care about are OK.

Access an excellent resource developed by the Red Cross to support you to talk with children and young people about their fears and confusion.



Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness.

Brené Brown

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CREATE a calm home

While this is no doubt easier said than done, life will be far less stressful if you embrace some calm-inducing tactics.

There are some parenting hacks from Maggie Dent, the 'queen of common sense', to help create calm while coping with the corona chaos.

To be honest many of you will be experiencing a form of grief. Our world as we knew it has fallen apart. If you are experiencing tears and irrational anger – be gentle with yourself, we need to grieve when a significant loss occurs. This is normal, not a sign of weakness.

Maggie Dent



DEVELOP a daily routine

Kids thrive on routine. Shower, have breakfast, get dressed and (loosely!) plan your day, and make sure you include as much time as possible for some physical exercise.

But here's the kicker. While the idea of a neat orderly schedule is appealing for some, it can be a nightmare for others, and in this new way of life, rigid routines are unlikely to succeed. Where possible, explain to your children WHY certain decisions are being made. This great resource explains how and why family routines work.

LINK 

EXPECTATIONS...

Keep them low!

This is not the time to implement strict family rules (apart from those associated with hygiene and self-isolation!).

For those with older children, work with them to develop a daily timetable that takes account of the schools' guidance about class and break times and your times for phone or zoom meetings. But most importantly, do what works best for your family - remain flexible and connected and regularly check in with one another over a snack and a cuppa.



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FEELINGS Get ready for lots of them!

Go gently with one another and cut your children lots of slack when it comes to any increase in behaviour issues. Anxiety, stress and fear are likely to show up as anger, meltdowns, tantrums and defiance.

When this occurs (and it will), know it's normal.

Show your children that they can trust you with their big feelings - do your best to reassure them that everything will be OK. Hug, comfort and console them as if they'd been badly hurt – because they are likely to feel hurt or confused on many levels.



GO EASY on yourself and the home schooling

Don't change your day job...you stick to yours (parenting) and let your child's teacher stick to theirs! For younger children, being engaged with lots of play is all the learning they need - having fun helps children thrive and optimises their health and development.

Include children in mealtime and baking activities where they can count and discuss ingredients and enjoy the process. Find more information about the importance of play and learning for pre-schoolers.

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HELPLINES & RESOURCES



A number of helplines are in place to support you and your family. Don't hesitate to pick up the phone and make contact. Having someone to talk to during uncertain times like these is essential.

Kids Helpline 1800 551 800

It's Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Beyond Blue Support Service 1300 224 636

They work to address issues associated with depression, suicide, anxiety disorders and other related mental disorders.

National coronavirus (COVID-19) Helpline 1800 020 080

The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Australian Government Whatsapp update Subscription

Add the government's WhatsApp number into your WhatsApp contacts. The number is +61 400 253 787. Send the WhatsApp account a message.

Lifeline - 13 11 14

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services

Visit our website to find more useful links and resources for you, your community and family.



IMPACT

on your relationship

Adapting to living in close quarters 24/7 is challenging. Make time to share with one another about what's important to each of you and why.

Now is also the time to learn more about the art and skills of parenting and to support one another to do the best by your children. Whether you live together or separately, this is a time for parents to put aside their own differences and focus on the best interests of their child.

And while we're talking about relationships, remember that during periods of high anxiety and stress, at least one partner's sex drive is likely to either significantly decline or increase. Maintain respect and adjust your expectations of one another during this stressful time. Find more information about healthy and respectful relationships.





JUGGLE Struggle

Balancing work and family priorities is a very real dilemma for many parents at the best of times...but the need to work from home whilst caring for young children takes this dilemma to a whole new level. Encourage your workplace to consider some of these ideas:

- Split the work day into two or three overlapping shifts and maybe use weekends as an alternative workday.
- Test productivity levels by reducing full-time work hours from 8 to say 5 or 6.
- Review, swap, and share roles and tasks to help achieve a more equitable and appropriate distribution of intensive, creative, and process tasks.
- Reduce the number of staff and time required for meetings.
- Be upfront with your team and manager about your family situation, develop a solution and advise them you'll keep refining it until you find what works best.
- Take a break from emails – use the 'out of office' setting strategically.
- Set up shared files and team inboxes to share coverage across roles and tasks.
- Build in time to connect with your team to debrief, review and reassess - you're all in this together.

KINDNESS

Kindness and compassion are the new cool. Be it. Do it. Show it! At any time, consistent loving and gentle interactions such as cuddling, smiling, reading, singing and having fun help to wire your child's brain for healthy development.

But in times of distress and trauma, it's even more important.

Read tips to help comfort and protect children, produced by UNICEF after the summer bushfires in Australia.



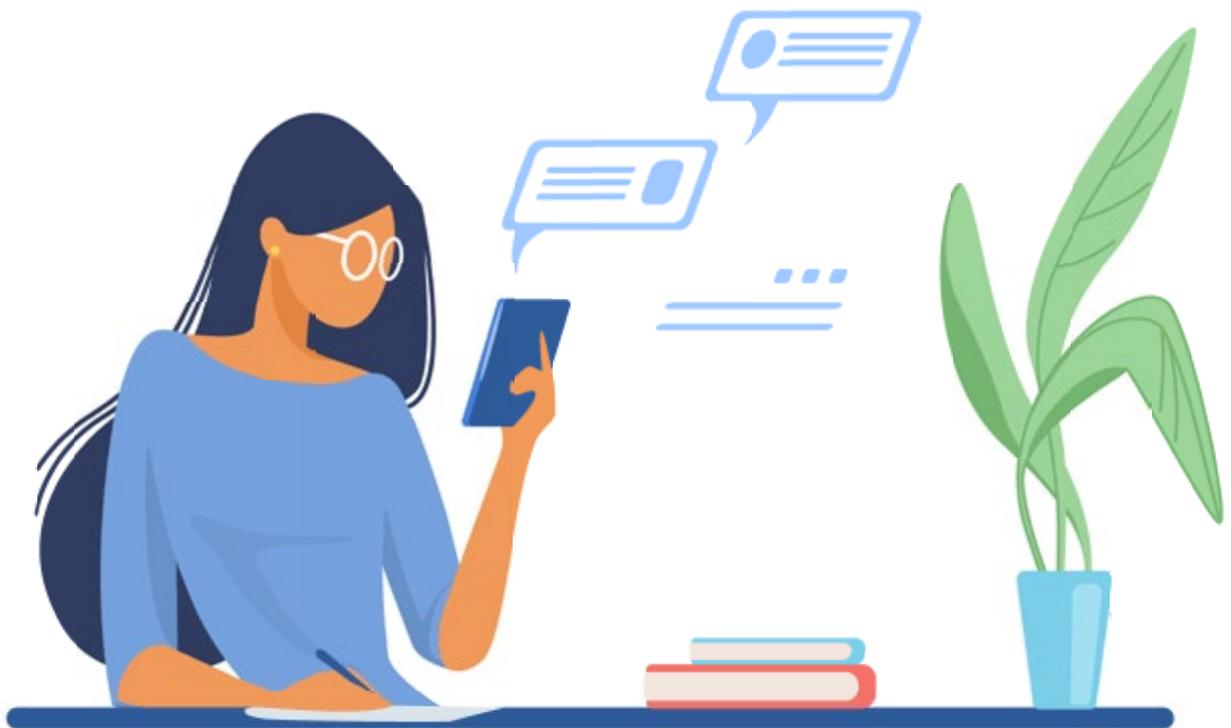
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LIMIT YOUR CHILD'S EXPOSURE to bad news and keep your kids safe online

Try not to expose your children to news coverage about the coronavirus (including adult conversations) and do be vigilant about what your kids are doing online. Explore more advice on how to help your child stay safe online.

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MINDFULNESS APPS for children

There are hundreds of online tools, (many of them free) that can help children to manage stress and anxiety. Listen to them together and everyone will benefit! Explore more...

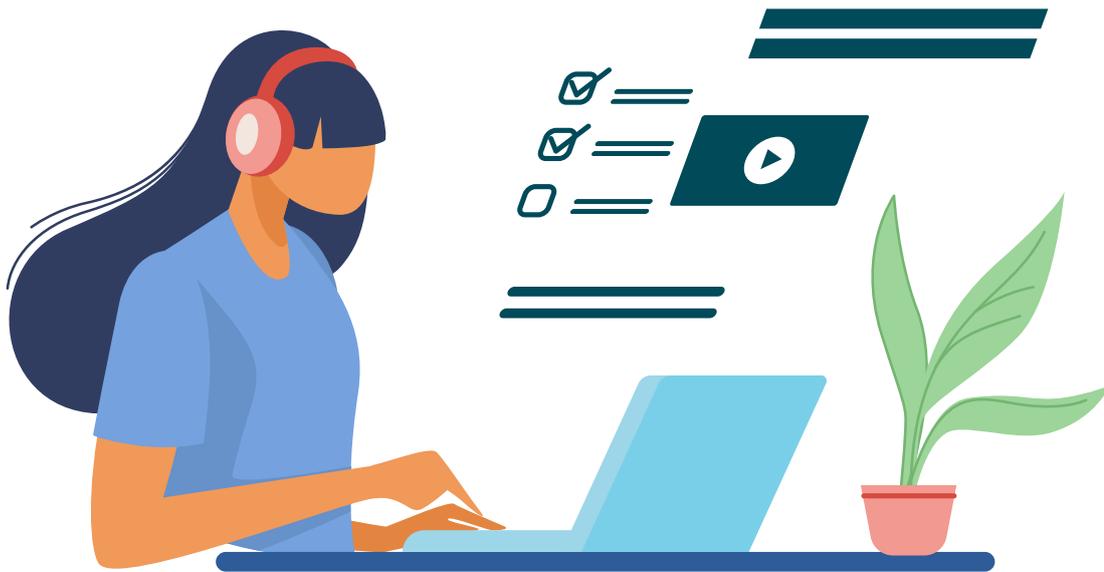
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THE NEW NORMAL

Maintaining a sense of normality is a great way to support mental health and wellbeing during these difficult times. For most kids, school is as much about social interaction as it is about education so support them to maintain these connections. Listening to your kids talk to others will also give you insights into what's really going on for them – use that information wisely to support them.



OFFICIAL INSTRUCTION manual for this new way of life

There isn't one...this is definitely a role where you're required to learn on the job! But there are loads of useful online parenting resources that can help guide and inform you.

Access a large range of podcasts from one of Australia's most trusted parenting experts, Dr Justin Coulson from Happy Families.

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PERFECT PARENTS



Just joking...there's no such thing! Take the pressure off and just do your best. Recall the funny meme...'Once upon a time I was a perfect parent. Then I had children. The end'.

(Story told by practically every parent after they became one!).

QUARANTINE

You know, it's not all bad... Remember all that time and effort it used to take to get the family out the door?

Revisit these memories by watching comedian Michael McIntyre's Leaving the House clip – it'll give you a great belly laugh!



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REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

about working from home with children

Set realistic expectations about what can be achieved in a day and make sure you include time to 'switch off'. For instance, if you can, treat yourself to a daytime nap, which, as it turns out, is a very effective way to support your immune system!

You might also need to review your usual approach to kids' screen time - make it work for you. For instance, schedule screen time for when you need to make that important work call in your newly established 'Do Not Disturb' zone (aka your bedroom or bathroom).

Check out these fun and free educational websites.

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#Sharetheload

Like many other carer roles, the role of parenting is often undervalued in our society.

For families living in very close quarters, now would be a good time to share the worry, school management, emotional and household load that comes along with parenting young children.

Look for inspiration from India's #sharetheload campaign, which has been instrumental in sparking conversations about the unequal division of domestic chores.

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To-do-lists

Warning: In times like these, to-do lists can be dangerous, resulting in unrealistic expectations that can never be met. Stop them now – at least in the short term.

Try writing a Not-to-do-list instead!



UNPREDICTABLE, UNRELENTING, UNTIDY AND UNIMAGINABLE

This is likely to be your vocabulary (and reality) for the foreseeable future.

If you have a need for control, beware! Adjusting to this new way of life will take time and patience – for your sanity's sake, and everyone around you!

Keep Calm and Stay Flexible!



As the African proverb wisely says, 'It takes a village to raise a child'. But for most parents, the village is in self-isolation now too! So use your devices for good and build your own online village with close family and trusted friends.

You may need to help set up some of the older village members with appropriate technology so that they can join the online family fun!

THE VILLAGE

LINK 

WORKING FLEXIBLY

is about working smarter

Get ahead of the curve and use this time to learn more about leading and being part of a flexible team. It's not just about where and when you work - it requires changes to working environments as well as culture, technology and management approaches. It includes:



- Inclusive leadership and trusting work cultures
- Open and collaborative mindsets to support new ways of working
- Valuing different work styles and working to your strengths
- Effective use of technology and permission to take risks
- Knowing what types of flexible work formats suit particular roles
- Valuing performance by outcome (eg. a great idea) not presence (being seen at your desk).



eXchange your Iphone for eye contact

If ever there was a time to clean up some of your less than desirable Iphone habits it's now. Spending time talking and having light-hearted fun with children sends a signal that you genuinely care.

Eye contact helps babies and children to develop closer bonds and relax and trust that you've got this (even if you don't feel like you do – which will be perfectly normal!)



YOUR PRIORITIES

As a parent, you have a really important role to play – to prioritise your child’s wellbeing. While children still need to be educated, more importantly, they need to be reassured.

Cut the kids some slack - this is NOT business as usual.

Children are just as likely to be as distracted and unsettled as you are. Help them find some positives. Maybe everyone gets to sleep in a bit longer because there’s no travel time. Or perhaps set some individual goals, family activities or wish list to be reviewed over dinner.



Z

Zero



The number of unexpected visitors you can expect in the next few months...(Yay?)



Acknowledgments

Heartfelt thanks to the small group of wonderful people who helped bring this little book to life so quickly: Rachel Haywood from Western Sydney MRC for your incredibly generous and highly skilled design prowess and encouragement, Vanessa Vanderhoek for your original inspiration and my precious gang of clever and encouraging friends and family for your wise and thoughtful contributions.

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