

Teaching Family Values During a Time of Crisis

During this unique and emotional time, many parents are juggling health concerns for our families and communities, employment and financial fears, and navigating additional roles we've been thrust into — teacher, sports coach and activities coordinator, to name a few. This is no easy task.

Despite the struggles many of us are collectively coping with, there can be an opportunity within this global crisis. We may be having more family time and living at different pace due to stay at home orders. As some of life's typical obligations, activities and distractions are stripped away, we have the opportunity to find more clarity on our fundamental values and what is truly important to us and to our families. In doing so, we can help our children understand and act on these values as well. We can even show children and teens how to identify and develop some of their own independent values.

Why is this important? Clarity in values can be a guiding light during both calm and stormy times; and it can enhance the meaningfulness and wisdom we gain through life experiences.

So how do children learn values? Not just through academic discussion. Learning about values takes time, and is most effective when modeled by parents, discussion of real-life examples, and through children's own experiential learning.

Here are other tips for parents on teaching values to their children during a crisis:

- Be generous in showing love and affection to your children. This provides a foundation for them in developing compassion, as well as for their understanding of all other values.
- Take notice of what you are modeling through your own actions, as this will speak louder than your words.
- Apologize when you make mistakes.
- Talk about your values and why they are important to you. Discuss the role of your own values as you make everyday choices.
- When you see your child showing a value you prioritize, label it and applaud your child's actions.
- Discuss examples of values and choices from the news or from your own day.
- Help your child identify important values from their own life experience and challenging situations they face. Encourage your child to reflect on and talk about how they made a difficult decision, weighing different factors. Help them identify the values that guided their decision.



- Use movies, books and television shows as a springboard for discussion of the characters' values and choices. Commonsensemedia.org provides a [helpful guide](#) to children's/teen's tv shows and movies, organized by the various values, strengths and character traits that they promote.
- Involve your children in helping others.
- Have each family member pick one or two values that are especially important to them. Take turns talking about why they are important to that family member. Consider developing a family mission statement that incorporates the values identified by everyone. Refer back to this mission statement to help navigate challenging moments. You can even develop a family mascot that represents these values and serves as a fun and tangible reminder.

There are numerous values to consider when identifying those most important to you and your family. Some ideas include fairness, empathy, responsibility, honesty, loyalty, leadership, playfulness, kindness, faith, caution, achievement, forgiveness, justice, humor, self-control, dependability, patience, respect, courage and more.

Below are additional examples of several values that may be of particular benefit to highlight as we all do our part as families and as a community to overcome the current health crises our country and the world is facing.

1. Kindness and helping others

There are many ways to demonstrate these values during the current COVID-19 pandemic, and to recognize these behaviors in others. Lend a helping hand, offer to grocery shop for an elderly or medically vulnerable neighbor, and do your part to support social distancing. Children can help with chores and help a younger sibling with homework. Your family may be able to donate money or supplies to others in need.

2. Health and self-care

Both physical and emotional health and well-being are more important now than ever. Prioritize a healthy routine for all family members — parents included! Ensure plenty of sleep; time for exercise; time for leisure activities such as art projects, music and reading; time for social connection; and time for work and learning.

3. Peaceful conflict resolution

Social distancing has resulted in a lot more family time in many homes. This can be wonderful at times and can try our patience at other times. This is an opportunity to model and help children practice staying calm and keeping a clear head in the face of disagreements and frustration. Work on effective communication strategies. Take a deep breath, engage in perspective taking, hear the situation from another viewpoint and consider others' perspectives, and work on finding a compromise together.



4. Creativity

Point out the ways in which all family members are using creative problem-solving to adjust to our new lifestyles. For children, this means adapting to online school, finding new ways to stay connected to friends that don't require in person contact, creating space for multiple family members to work from home, and managing on smaller family budgets.

5. Curiosity and learning

Find interesting new books to read online and take advantage of the many online learning and enrichment programs available. Many of these resources are free during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Here's a list of educational and fun resources that are free during this time.](#) Support your child in identifying an area of interest and encourage them to research it over the next few weeks. You can help them in finding videos, books and articles that give more information about this this topic. Or, help them research and learn a new skill like sewing, cooking, art, science or music, for example. They can even give a presentation to the family about their new area of knowledge.

6. Perseverance and resilience

Focus on the things we can control in a time of great uncertainty. Emphasize how getting through a difficult time can build strength, wisdom and the resilience to manage other challenges that life may bring. [Learn more about teaching your child resilience during COVID-19.](#)

7. Teamwork

This may be a time when you are able to help your children learn new responsibilities around the home to help the family. Praise them for helping parents cook meals, cleaning up or helping a younger sibling.

8. Gratitude and appreciation

Model and teach these values to your children in challenging moments. Help them return focus on the positives. Remind them of the joy and satisfaction that can be found in the small moments— like playing with siblings, creating a new art project, learning a new skill, cuddling with a favorite pet, enjoying a cozy spot in their home, reading a great book and the presence of loved ones. Express appreciation for all the essential workers who are helping keep our communities running, despite the ways in which this may increase their own risk of becoming ill.



9. Flexibility

Many of us have had to shift gears and change short- and longer-term plans abruptly amid the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting social distancing guidelines. Our children and teens are also facing major changes to the plans they had laid out for the coming months. High school students are facing the prospect of missing prom, graduation ceremonies and other important rituals and rites of passage. Younger children are missing sports events, school classes, birthday parties, playdates, family gatherings, academic competitions, and many other events both large and small. In the face of these disappointments, help your child acknowledge their losses and praise their ability to embrace new ways to learn, connect with friends and family, and celebrate important milestones. This flexibility will be a tremendous strength when facing future disappointments when life doesn't follow our best laid plans. [Learn more about how to talk to kids about disappointment during COVID-19.](#)

10. Mindfulness

Work toward staying centered during stressful and uncertain times. Help your children take time to appreciate small moments. Show support for the difficult emotions our current health crises and lifestyle changes bring, and help children understand that a full life is a mix of ups and downs. Teach them that these difficult times can add to the fabric of our existence and the meaning we find in life, contributing to our wisdom and compassion for others.

11. Love and compassion

Model compassion for others and oneself. When making mistakes, accept, apologize and move forward. Be forgiving to ourselves as parents – doing what we can each day, accepting our imperfections and recognizing the good intentions in our efforts.

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