

Simple Wellbeing Tips for Challenging Times

During this unprecedented time, there are many things we are being asked to do differently. Some of these things require a big shift and learning curve but some of things can be addressed by looking at the situation differently.

Here are some guidelines that will be useful for you and your family, to maintain a good level of mental and physical health during a time when we are all going to need to use our strengths and engage a positive and HOPEFUL outlook. They are guided by the Professor Lea Waters SEARCH Framework in Visible Wellbeing.

Strengths

Most of your children are well acquainted with their Character Strengths. Character Strengths are those values that are inherently important to us and we all have them! We also value different ones more than others.

Ask your child if they know what their character strengths are. If they don't know, you can look at the free survey on www.viacharacter.org to find out more. It is a wonderful eye opener for us and our children to know what we value and what comes naturally to us.

Research shows that using our Character Strengths is a sure fire way to increase resilience and confidence along with helping us FEEL better. I think this is highly important at times such as these, don't you?!

Our top 5 strengths are called our Signature Strengths. If your child has a signature strength of Kindness, they will benefit from finding ways to be kind to others. At this time of "physical distancing" we need people to intentionally use their strengths as others may not have the same ideas and motivations that we do. This is how we can intentionally use the gifts God has given us, to bring His love and light into a hurting world.

A child with a signature strength of creativity, might come up with ideas that can be used to enhance learning or connecting online with their classmates. Some students have used their Creativity and Love of Learning to design new board games.

Have a conversation with your child about their signature strengths and how they can use them at this time to bring joy to themselves and others.

Particular Character Strengths that can be useful in times such as these are:

Gratitude:

Help your child and yourself focus and name all the things we have to be grateful for. Rather than maintaining a continual focus on all the negative or challenges, take time to refocus on what is good and where we are blessed.

I am so grateful for the backyard I have and ability to go outside even in lock down.

I am grateful we have a good supply of food.

I am grateful I have internet, to allow me to still connect with others.

I am grateful for living rurally, where I have more space.

I am grateful for the friends I have who reach out in times in need.

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence:

Many of our children have a strength in Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence. This means they get great joy out of finding things that are beautiful and unique, taking photos, watching nature documentaries and finding out about creation, listening to music, looking at art, going outside in nature.

This is a time to remember to prompt our children to do these activities and for those who don't have it as a top strength, to take time to grow it.

It is amazing how many things we fail to notice around us, that could give us awe and wonder-but we are too busy to notice. We are now given an opportunity to change this.

Kindness:

Believe it or not, Kindness is also a top strength for many of our kids! Acts of Kindness not only benefit the receiver, but research shows it benefits the GIVER even more.

Take time to reach out to others and really listen. In this age of social media, it is sad to see how isolated people can be even when receiving many messages via social media. WE need to connect, to show care and to follow up with actions where we can.

Turning our thoughts to how we can help others, helps us from being self-focused and overwhelmed by our own problems.

Find different ways as a family to show kindness to others.

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Emotional Management

Emotional Management is the ability to manage our reactions to things. At present, with all the changes and concern over health, work, schooling, finances etc we are ALL in a state of stress. For some it might be a low level irritability or decrease in patience, for others much more intense. The way our bodies were designed to cope with threat, is to trigger off our fight, flight or freeze.

Given we are all in a state of flux, we must remember to check in with our bodies and perform what has been called an “anxiety hack”.

When we are calm, our bodies breathe at a particular rate. This rate is to exhale for twice as long as we inhale. When we are stressed, this changes and becomes more shallow as our bodies gear up for fight or flight. So, intentionally taking opportunity to breathe as we would when we are calm can help us lower our stress levels.

If you would like to watch a you tube clip on this, here it is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xalaT2FwS8>

Attention and Awareness

Most times, this is a very important topic area-we need to slow down and learn how to build our ability to pay attention! Now, we are given a rare opportunity to really take hold of “going slow”. Let’s be grateful for this gift and learn how to pay attention to more things around us. Once again, how to look around and appreciate all the signs of beauty around us. How to be more aware of what is happening in our bodies, how we are feeling, when we need to use our “breathing hack”, when we need to stretch our bodies and exercise.

This is also where we can use an underlying practice for Visible Wellbeing which is called See, Hear, Feel. Stopping to ask ourselves at different times, what are we Seeing right now (my child is looking really disengaged), what are we Hearing (my child saying, “I don’t know” or “I can’t”), what are WE Feeling in response to this (I Feel frustrated and impatient, but now I have the opportunity to take some deep breaths and CHOOSE to ask what is going on for them, instead of reacting in anger and frustration).

Many people also practice Mindfulness and other mediation techniques to enhance their attention and awareness. This is a wonderful time to sit quietly in prayer or meditation. Waiting. Listening. Rather than rushing from one thing to the next.

Relationships

This speaks for itself. Stay connected!! Take time to make phone calls you usually wouldn't have the time to make. Set up whats app groups, thinking of people who may not be as connected as you.

At the moment, we can still pass on notes, cards etc to others. Think of people who might really benefit from receiving one of these, letting them know you are thinking of them and will keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Again, lets improve our quality of relationships by really listening, asking questions and waiting for answers.

We have become a society where people often don't even wait to hear the reply once they've asked, "how are you?". We are better than that. Let's really care for one another. There will be people in our community that are impacted by sickness and even death (whether COVID 19 related or not)-let's not lose sight of the fact that we need to show authentic care for those affected individually and model to our children to do the same.

Coping

We have LOTS of information coming at us and various opinions. However, we need to make a choice about what we put our focus and attention on. If we surround ourselves with negative and concerning messages, it WILL impact our mental and emotional health-which in turn impacts our physical health. Yes we need to know important information but "watch what you watch". Be careful of the amount of information and the sources you listen to. Get a balance of staying informed and filling your mind with other information that will lift your spirits and hope. For some this might be praying and worshipping or chatting once a day with a friend who will make you laugh. Watching light hearted comedy or focusing on learning a new skill. Reminding ourselves that there are some things we don't have any control over but there are MANY things we do.

I have a goal of increasing my fitness at this time. Whenever I start to feel anxious or "heavy" I am going to run on my mini trampoline. What can you do?

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/melbourne/programs/afternoons/beautiful-conversations-on-afternoons-with-jacinta/12076186>

Habits

Finally, Habits are SO important in times of crisis. They can help keep us moving forward and keep some structure in situations that are everchanging.

- Keep to the same sleep/wake cycle you normally would for school and work. Keeping our circadian rhythms balanced and in a good cycle, will help promote good health (both physically and mentally).
- Get dressed each day. Although it is VERY tempting (trust me, I know!) to stay in Pj's all day, and a novelty to hold meetings on line in PJ's-in the long run, it doesn't help you maintain a sense of routine and positive outlook. Getting dressed, tells your mind (and your kid's minds) that we are ready to work and do our best.
- Create habits of exercise. Schedule times to go outside, do workouts together, have fitness challenges amongst your family or with friends.
- Utilise this time to have ongoing access to your furry friends! Petting animals and spending time with them, has a tremendously good effect on your brain and the release of oxytocin which helps us feel good. Soak it up!
- Choose to eat as healthily as you can to boost both your immune system and your brain.

