

# Caring for Yourself and Young Children During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Crisis



The COVID-19 pandemic has created a high stress situation for everyone, especially parents. Not knowing what will come next causes a lot of worry. It may feel like too much. A few tips for this difficult time:

- 1. Practice social distancing.** It's important to change your habits to reduce both your family's risk and illness in your community. Social distancing really means physical distancing. Stay home as much as possible and stay 6 feet away from other people when you are out. Children should stay home as much as they can. Wash everyone's hands frequently—and for at least 20 seconds. You and your children are probably used to having time apart. Maybe you went to work or school while they were at child care. Physical distancing is tough. It means you're all home 24 hours a day and you never get a break!
- 2. Take good care of yourself.** Self-care is not selfish. It's the best way to keep yourself well so you can *take good care of your children*. You may be afraid for yourself and family members. You might be worried about lost income or not having enough groceries. Tempers are probably short with so much stress and crowded quarters. Try to create a daily schedule and stick to regular routines as much as possible. Make sure you are all sleeping enough to reduce irritability. If possible, try to avoid arguments with your partner.
- 3. Go easy on yourself and your children.** If you're losing your temper a lot, take a break. It's OK to put your baby in the crib and walk away to catch your breath. Call a friend or family member for moral support. Use nap time to relax. If your child is too old for naps, arrange for daily "quiet time." Stay nearby but take care of yourself. Remember, this situation is not your, or your child's fault.
- 4. Don't expect your child to learn new skills (potty-training, etc.) right now.** Even with all this worry, young children need you to be their "home base." They need you to stay calm and provide stable routines. Connect with your children when you are in an "up" mood. Shower them with love and attention when you can.

- 5. Know that your child's behavior may change.** It's normal for young children to get upset when there are changes to the routine. However, most young children *don't use words* to share these feelings. They "tell" you through their behavior. They may get fussy or aggressive. Some go back to earlier behaviors like wanting a pacifier or waking up throughout the night. It's easy to get frustrated since you're already so stressed. Instead, pause and think about what your child's behavior could be telling you. What might they need? They may sense your worries and just need extra hugs. They might need a good cry just like you do.
  
- 6. When things get too hard, focus on your breath.**
  - a. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest
  - b. Take a deep breath into your belly and feel your hand rise
  - c. Exhale slowly and gently through your lips (like you are blowing on hot soup)
  - d. Repeat two to four times
  - e. Respond to the situation once you are calm

Take each day as it comes. Find more information and guidance at [zerotothree.org](https://zerotothree.org) and call your HealthySteps Specialist for support or help getting basic necessities.