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Dear Fellow Mothers,

I was asked to share a few practical ideas on the topic of having children home during these challenging times.

As mothers, our children are counting on us for stability and support during the weeks ahead. What can we do to maintain our own mental health, as well as support our children's needs in the best possible way?

1. **Work on staying calm, or as calm as possible.** Focus on getting through the moment one day at a time. "What if" or "Who knows" thoughts are not helpful at this time. Your job is to get through this one day at a time, which is a manageable task. If you are calm, your children will be calmer as well.
2. **Shift priorities.** In life, there are goals and there are priorities. You may be holding onto goals and values that are important but may not be priority at this moment in time. As a mother, my priorities right now are to keep my home environment safe physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Maintaining peace between siblings and keeping everyone productive, calm and focused to the best of my ability is also important. When we consciously identify current priorities, we can then let go of other expectations as necessary.
3. **Model flexibility.** There has never been a time when so much flexibility is needed. We need to be aware that our own innate craving for routine may get in the way of creating the atmosphere we would like to create. We need utmost flexibility to get through this situation. We may need to say 'yes' when we may be used to saying 'no'. We may need to get used to a later bedtime for some of the older children. Using clay dough and art projects at the kitchen table (yes it makes a huge mess!) are activities we should consider. In general, don't be rigid; let's make a note to be as flexible as the moment demands.
4. **Talk to your children about the situation.** Don't assume they are ok with all the changes around them just because they 'look ok'. They may be hearing a lot of information and misinformation that seems frightening and confusing. Open the conversation by inviting them what they heard and what they know about the virus, about why school is canceled. Then add age appropriate information such as what professionals are saying, proper boundaries and hygiene, and correct any

misconceptions that they may have. Tell them they can always come to an adult with any questions; they should not believe everything they hear but should verify with a parent or trusted adult.

5. **Create a schedule for the day;** a visual schedule that is hung on the fridge is great for the younger ones. Although it may be different than it used to be, there can be a set wake up time, davening time, play time, meal times, learning times and bedtimes. Children do better when they know what to expect, and in these uncertain times, at least the home routines should remain constant (while allowing for flexibility, see #3 😊)
6. **If your child is *anxious, impulsive, dysregulated*** or otherwise reacting to the situation in behaviorally challenging ways, keep in mind the following tips:
 - Empathize with them; the situation isn't easy for them at all
 - Listen to them; they may express their worries and fears if you show you are open to listening. You would not believe what my 11-year-old thought a lock-down was! It included police, and guns and tying down people... imagine what he thought when a classmate told him there will be a lock-down!! It's no wonder he was walking around looking anxious!
 - Believe they can get through this; they can handle this.
 - State rules and expectations clearly; for example: we use headphones while listening to music in the playroom.
 - Be a 'broken record' when disciplining: for example, state the rule calmly and repeatedly as needed: for example; *we don't use our hands for hurting.*
 - Distract and Redirect as often as possible.
 - If your child has a hard time playing by himself or self-regulating, try to preempt issues by keeping him/her busy.
 - Include some physical activity or sensory play in your daily schedule or as needed. Examples activities that may be calming to children include: playing with magic sand, playing with clay dough, washing toys with water and soap, listening to a story/CD while wrapped up in blankets in bed, or organizing books/toys.
 - Put on calming music in the background.
 - Praise them for good behavior; catch them being good as often as possible.
7. **Academic goals:** you may be worried, and for good reason, that your children will fall behind academically, especially as they are behind already. As a mother, this can and should be a secondary priority. Set up a learning schedule where we practice reading, writing, kria'ah etc. This should be in addition to any phone hotlines that schools have set up as it will be targeting their specific goals. If you

have older siblings, they can be part of teaching younger siblings. *Additionally, YVY is also doing their utmost possible to be able to provide services for your children as they recognize the importance of this.*

8. **Involve your children in your work;** keep them busy. Pesach is coming! Instead of giving up (how can we make Pesach with the children around??), allow them to be involved. Get them to clean toys (that may or may not need to be cleaned). Let them bake or cook if they enjoy that. Look away at the mess that this kind of 'help' involves; if it works for getting us through the day calmly, it's worth it. Don't be afraid to ask and insist on help when needed; it's important for children to feel useful and helpful. *Don't forget to thank them effusively for their help.*
9. **Teenagers need space.** Allow them some extra space while they figure out how to handle the change in pace and routine. You can state basic expectations clearly; you can also be clear that you will not allow them to engage in certain behaviors that either hurt or bother others (or themselves); but in general we are giving them a bit more slack if their mood or behavior is a bit less than what you usually expect. I do want to add that teenagers do tend to rise to the occasion once they feel respected and valued. Additionally, don't assume teenagers understand the facts they have heard 'out there'; open the conversation to discuss what is happening. They can understand things in a mature fashion and should be spoken to as the almost adults they are. End the conversation on a positive note, thanking them for sharing their thoughts and encouraging them to turn to you with questions.
10. **Take a break when you need it.** Don't feel guilty if you need to take a break via a nap, coffee, or just quiet time. Children can learn to respect Mommy's boundaries. Just be clear that you can be interrupted for emergencies (and define emergencies) and give them choices of what they can be doing at that time. Again, clear expectations are key here.

Ultimately, keep in mind that you can do what is in your control; leave the rest up to Hashem.

Should you want to touch base with your child's clinical supervisor or myself, feel free to email to pd@yeled.org, and include your contact information, child's name, and school your child attends.

We would be happy to connect and support you however we can.

Wishing all our parents much hatzlacha!

Gitty Rosenfeld

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