



Balance in the Time of Coronavirus

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As I write, communities across the world are experiencing profound changes taking place as a result of social distancing and self-quarantine initiatives. These changes bring a multitude of heightened emotions and challenges as both children and adults respond to a new environment. It is reassuring that while we may be experiencing unprecedented change, the strategies to manage these stressors and feelings of anxiety and panic are the same strategies we have coached people to use before, and will coach people to use as we emerge and return to normalcy.

Parents who are worried about their children's stress response and anxiety related to family or community changes need to remember this most important point -

Take Care of Yourself!

There is a reason why airline safety demonstrations remind travelers to place their own oxygen mask first: without taking care of yourself, you cannot take care of others. Be sure to give yourself the grace to know that in any change, you and your family are moving into unprecedented territory. Focus on what you can control, and accept that there may be moments that you just "can't."

Consider the following for you and your family's well-being:

- Expect and prepare for stress of change: Know the things that help you relax, and use them during this time.
- Research: Know as much as you can about what is coming as things change, but do not dwell on the unknown. Recognize your own risk of distorted thinking.
- Find the balance: Know when to step away from social media, the news, and even people who are increasing your stress. Do not be afraid to take space, or relax expectations.



WHAT DO WE DO?

We work every day to strengthen lives.

(continued)

- Give grace: To yourself, to your family, to the world at large. Change is difficult, and managing stress requires internal resources. Big periods of change can drain those resources leading to mistakes, crankiness, and behaviors.
- Develop routines: People take comfort in knowing what is next. Establish a daily routine, but do not forget to build in breaks, and do not be afraid to step back from the routine itself if necessary.
- Focus on your values and not your fear: Know what is important to you during the time of change and focus on moving toward those values.
- Accept that change is stressful: Own the stress, and move forward. Practice mindfulness and find the humor and joy in simple things.
- Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep: But do not forget to have dessert and it is ok to stay up late to finish the family movie.

Most importantly, through any change, stay connected with friends, with family, and with neighbors. Human beings are social beings, and even the most introverted people need to feel connected to a community. Do not forget to ask for help if things become overwhelming.

If you or a family members' stress during this time of widespread change starts to fall into problematic anxiety or panic, please reach out. The Bridge's team of mental health professionals is here to help you and your family navigate your individual journey.

While we are all sheltering in place, the Bridge continues to offer one-on-one counseling sessions in our clinics. Many clients have opted to "meet" either by phone or through Telehealth. This technology allows therapists to teleconference securely with clients using smart phones, Ipads, or computers. Face-to-face engagement occurs from the safety of your home.

Please call 960.521.8035 to schedule an appointment.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD COPE WITH CHANGE

- Tell them what they need to know about the changing circumstances, but do not overwhelm them with details.
- Answer questions. Tailor your response to your child's age and developmental understanding, but don't forget that children listen to adults talk to each other, and as they get older they are exposed to their own social media and other interactions.
- Keep structure and routine in place, but do not be afraid to be flexible.
- Expect difficult behaviors at times. Change is stressful for everyone and stress taxes children's internal resources. Give reasonable leeway while sending high expectation messages.
- Find the humor in the inevitable challenges during this time.

TEEN CENTER OFFERS VIRTUAL GROUPS

Recognizing the importance of our teens staying connected with friends during this time of self-isolation, The Base, our West Hartford Teen Center, is now offering virtual groups to West Hartford high school students. Weekly check-in groups, a girls group, a video game group, a book club, and an Instagram fitness challenge are now being formed. For more information, email Jon Merritt (jmerritt@bridgefamilycenter.org) or Chris Dutton (cdutton@bridgefamilycenter.org), and follow The Base Instagram at [baseteencenter](#).

