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Hello,

I hope this note finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. As we enter another week of physical distancing, something that is on my mind is finding the balance between acknowledging the negative feelings we are all experiencing during the pandemic and finding a sense of hope and optimism amidst the chaos. It is inevitable that parents and children will be faced with some challenging emotions over the coming weeks: sadness, fear, loneliness, frustration, disappointment, and more. Depending on the age of your child(ren), it is important to use words to name the feelings as best we can. Simple statements such as:

- “I’m sad that we can’t see Grammy because of the virus.”
- “You got really quiet after you read Apple News earlier. I wonder if you felt frightened by some of the things you read.”
- “I’m noticing that you’re having a lot of big feelings lately. It can be frustrating to spend so much time with your brothers and to not have any time with friends.”
- “I love having our family together, but I am also missing my friends and feeling lonely for them. What’s that like for you?”
- “It is incredibly disappointing that ____ has been cancelled. I imagine you might feel both terribly sad and furious. This is really hard.”

Verbally acknowledging the negative feelings gives children the message that we can talk about these difficult emotions and that you are available to provide comfort and support. Sharing some of our own feelings about coping with the pandemic – in an age appropriate way – can also help children and teenagers connect to the fact that these difficult and unprecedented circumstances are being shared by others in their family as well as people all over the world.

While we want to give children the space to feel their negative emotions, it is also important to present a message of hope and optimism – belief in the idea that

we will get through this difficult time together. Keep in mind that coming through challenging circumstances will both help children develop empathy for others who are facing difficult experiences and help them build resilience. A wonderful way to encourage optimism is to embark on a project to help others – younger children can send colorful cards or drawings to neighbors or far away relatives, older children can help sew masks or offer to read a story or play a game with a younger cousin over video chat. Other simple ways to focus on hopefulness are to keep a family or individual gratitude journal and to practice noticing small moments of joy every day.

A couple of ideas and resources to consider:

- If you or your children are able to spend more time reading during this time at home, keep in mind how soothing it can be to re-read old favorites, what my family calls ‘comfort reads’. Children might want to re-visit old favorites - beloved picture books or a cherished series such as Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Warrior Cats, Magic Tree House, Ivy and Bean, Percy Jackson, or Harry Potter. Re-reading favorites still helps children practice literacy skills and can bring such a wonderful feeling of reassurance. Adults may also want to pull a comfort read from the shelf – after a long day of video meetings reading a familiar book might provide a few moments of much needed peace and well-being.
- On one of my child psychologist list serves, colleagues recommended [this website](#) which allows children to play a virtual game (Checkers, Crazy 8’s, Go Fish) with a friend over video conference. I’ve had lots of questions from parents about children who are uncertain or uncomfortable about connecting with friends on a video call. Playing a game together might provide some useful structure to the interaction.
- For children about 7 and younger, check out this [coloring book](#) designed to explain COVID-19 to young children. Download a copy, and you can print, read, and color it together.
- The Mass General Department of Psychiatry has compiled an excellent [list of mental health resources](#) for COVID-19 including specific resources for families and children as well as section about mindfulness resources.

My webinar this week:

Parenting Teens During the Pandemic

Please join Dr. Rachel Kramer for a webinar on **April 8, 2020 10:30am EDT**

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://zoom.us/j/545276644?pwd=bXIRd0FUSDFjVnFQS00yTy9TelZsdz09>

Password: 377336

As always, please feel free to pass this information along to anyone you know who might find it useful, and feel free to email me with questions you would like me to address in future webinars.

Warm regards,

Rachel