

Coronavirus Parenting: Managing Anger and Frustration

Parents everywhere are losing their temper and yelling at their kids. How to maintain your cool under stress.

Gia Miller (Abbreviated)

We know we're not supposed to yell at our children. But parents are very stressed at the moment, and frustration and anger are inevitable. Overwhelmed with everything you've been asked to do, you find yourself losing your temper at kids who aren't on their best behavior either. But when your circumstances aren't normal, your parenting won't be normal.

Right after many schools and workplaces were closed, there was a push for parents to see the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity, not to waste this extra time with their kids, says Stephanie Lee, PsyD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. "Parents were encouraged to organize their kids' closets, work on their math skills, etc., but realistically, that's just absurd. It's more important to just get through this and manage the best you can in a less-than-ideal situation."

It's time to lower our expectations. You won't be able to do as much as you usually can as a parent, employee or partner. Instead, experts recommend focusing on your and your children's emotional state and strive to maintain positive family dynamics.

You're doing a lot of yelling

My kids were at each other's throats all day. Around 3:00 p.m., they were screaming at each other again, and it hit my Very. Last. Nerve. With my palms pressed tight to my ears and angry tears, I started screaming at them!

When you do lose your cool, Michelle Kaplan, LCSW, a clinical social worker at the Child Mind Institute, advises that you wait to apologize until everyone has calmed down. Be honest with your kids and tell them if you're tired, hungry, struggling or overwhelmed. Apologize for your bad language and let them know you will work hard to do better. You can even involve your kids in some problem solving about what can be done differently next time.

Everyone needs your help at the same time

I feel like I'm a teacher, principal, cruise director, laundress, janitor, chef and servant all at the same time.

What parents are being asked to do is impossible, so you need to prioritize. Most importantly, make sure everyone is safe and their basic needs are met. Next, determine what you and your children can realistically accomplish daily, and then try to structure everyone's days so you're not overwhelmed.

You're throwing tantrums

I found myself in the middle of an attitude war with my mini-me four-year-old son. I was even sticking out my tongue at him, and not in a cute, light-hearted way. He did the same, and it continued longer than I care to admit.

I was trying to punish my son, but he wouldn't give me his computer. So I went into his room and took a stack of books from his dresser and threw them off, creating quite the commotion. He came bounding up the stairs, shocked by the noise. He was stunned. I used that moment to bolt downstairs and grab his computer!

Sharing your mishaps and even finding the humor in them is important, especially right now. But we know it's our job to model appropriate behavior. Once you begin to throw a tantrum, it's hard to rein it in, so plan in advance. For example, when you feel yourself getting upset, take some quiet time to yourself — even if it's just five minutes in the bathroom.

Reduce stress by celebrating successes, no matter how small

No matter how someone tries to spin it, this is a difficult time. Even the parents posting color-coded charts and complicated craft projects on social media are struggling. Remind yourself that you're a good parent who is doing the best you can in a very difficult situation by celebrating the small victories each day.

"Make a daily list of what you did well," advises Dr. Lee. "Did we all get dressed or half-dressed? Did everyone bathe today? Did we get half of our work done and then go on a family walk? Those are all victories."