



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
CHILDREN

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Flexibility and learning to adapt to change are core elements of resilience. During times of stress, families can lose structure and routines can be disrupted. If this happens, it is important to establish new or adjusted routines, a regular schedule and consistent expectations. When we do this, we help to make children's lives predictable, stable, safe and secure. Preparing children for the ups and downs of life can be done by actively fostering a positive attitude toward change. During this pandemic, learning to adapt with a positive attitude can help children better deal with challenging situations.

This week we focus on helping children to adapt to new or adjusted routines. We also look focus on helping children learn how to understand and adapt to change.

Flexibility with Routines

What may be a regular routine can sometimes be disrupted. It is important to know how to balance stable routines with changes that may occur. This adaptation to conditions can help children find consistency in a changing world. There are several ways to help your child deal with changes that may take place to their daily routines due to the pandemic.

- **Talk about changes.** Talk to your child about what will change and how it will change. For example, many children look forward to attending summer camp each summer. This summer, many camps will be closed and families will be faced with breaking the news to their children. Talk to your child about why this change is necessary and what it means for them.
- **Involve your child in decisions about the change.** Encourage your child to help you think of new things you can do to adapt to the change. Perhaps your child would enjoy creating a "summer camp" at home.
- **Try to keep other routines as consistent as possible.** When changes happen, remember that children still need consistency in their lives. Focus on maintaining routines that are still within your control.
- **Show your child that change can be a positive thing.** Talk to your child about changes in a positive way. When you face change with positivity, your child will too.

[Adapted from Helping Children Deal with Change](#)

Changes in routines can be more difficult for some children. Children with autism may view change as a disruption to their lives. These disruptions can cause increased anxiety and problem behaviors. Learn more about how to deal with these disruptions through a resource provided by [Autism Speaks](#).

Things May Change

Help your child understand that change is a natural part of life. Things can change, just like people's lives do. Point out the changes you see in things and explain how they are necessary. For example, explain that trees lose their leaves in the fall to help them survive the winter. Losing leaves helps trees to "rest" during the cold winter months. Without this rest, the tree would not be able to survive in the cold weather.

Ice Block Activity

Choose several small toys to freeze in a block of ice. Place the toys in a small bowl of water and freeze. You may also wish to add food coloring to the water. Once the water is frozen, take the block of ice outside or to a sink or tub. Encourage your child to pour warm water on the block of ice. Explain how the ice changes as the warm water is poured on it. Invite your child to dig out the frozen toys as they are able. You may also wish to sprinkle some salt on the ice. Salt causes tiny holes to develop in the ice. Discuss with your child how the ice is changing. There are many things in this world that change! [Learn more about teaching children how to adapt to change.](#)



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FAMILY

YOUTH

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Has your teen ever said, “I am who I am and nothing can change that,” or “I am not a math person”? Have you heard other teenagers say things like this? Youth can be described as having either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset and sometimes they switch between the two. According to Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, youth with a fixed mindset believe that abilities, intelligence, and talents are fixed, or cannot be changed in a meaningful way. On the other hand, youth with a growth mindset believe their abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, learning, and persistence. A growth mindset fosters motivation, resilience, and persistence in youth, while a fixed mindset creates a sense of

urgency in youth to prove themselves or to give up.

This week we will focus on promoting a growth mindset in youth. A growth mindset can help youth to adapt to change and to learn that being flexible is okay. Adaptation and flexibility work together to foster resilience.

Promoting a Growth Mindset

1. **Remind your teen that “a brain can grow.”** The brain is flexible, it never stops growing. This is exciting because it means our brain, with time and effort, can grow stronger.
2. **Praise the process, not the results.** For example, instead of saying, “I am thrilled you worked hard to save enough money for that new jacket,” reward the effort by saying, “You didn’t give up. You worked hard and your efforts paid off. Great job!”
3. **Reward persistence.** Acknowledge your teen’s hard work and persistence. When you see this in action, let them know. Example: “You’re really trying hard and taking your time to learn, aren’t you? Way to be persistent!”
4. **Use the word “yet.”** When your teen says “I can’t,” remind them that they “can’t, yet.”
5. **Link praise to something specific.** Instead of saying, “You’re really smart,” try “You took the time to think of creative ways to solve the problem. You kept trying even when some of the strategies didn’t work. Great job!”
6. **Failure is an opportunity to learn.** Talk positively about failures and mistakes (both yours and your teen’s). For example, talk to your teen about what they learned when something didn’t go as planned.
7. **Don’t be tough on your teen if they don’t succeed at something.** Instead, gently explore what happened and help them to make a plan for next time. You might ask, “What have you learned that can help?”
8. **Encourage your teen to make constructive self-statements.** Some examples might include, “I work hard,” “I am a creative person,” “I enjoy learning and discovering,” or “I care about others.”

Learn more about growth mindset by viewing [The Power of Believing That You Can Improve](#).

Activity

Having conversations with your teen at the dinner table (or any location) is a wonderful way to encourage growth mindset development. Consider the following questions to get a conversation started:

- What did you do today that took a lot of thought?
- What happened today that made you keep going despite wanting to stop? What strategies did you try?
- What did your mistake teach you? What did you learn from it?
- Did you try something today that was really hard? What made it hard?
- What will you do to challenge yourself today?
- What will you do to improve your work? What will you do to improve your talent?
- What will you do to solve this problem?



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YOUNG ADULTS

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Since the start of the pandemic, you and your family members have adapted to unprecedented situations. These adaptations may have related to areas such as school or work, where you live, or how you socialize; you've changed how you exist in the world. The flexibility that you and your family have had to show as it relates to weddings, graduation ceremonies, and other events that would have typically been celebrated with large gatherings is important to recognize, as many of these are occasions for which you have been preparing for a long time. Some, or perhaps most, of those changes weren't actually your choice; the government, your employers or schools, and perhaps even your family, required you to change your way of living to keep yourselves and

others safe.

But others of those adaptations were absolutely your decision — how you coped during this time, the ways you stayed connected to others, and the efforts you made to find the positives in a predominantly negative situation. Those adaptations may seem trivial, but they're not, because what they signal is your ability to be flexible, which is a quality that has innumerable benefits. From being able to learn and integrate information quickly, to solving problems creatively, to rapidly adjusting to new situations, cognitive flexibility is a key trait that allows people to succeed in all different kinds of contexts, including social, academic, occupational, etc. (Verdolin, 2019). So why not take up this opportunity — when you're primed for flexibility — to build up those cognitive flexibility skills even more!

Video Resources

- [Three Ways to Measure Your Adaptability and How to Improve It](#)
- [Purdue Graduate Featured on Some Good News](#)

Internal Actions

Dr. Jennifer Verdolin has these suggestions for increasing your cognitive flexibility ([via Psychology Today](#)):

1. Do something you know how to do, but do it differently (and often)
2. Pursue new challenges and experiences
3. Meet new people

External Actions

- Talk with your family about how your daily, weekly, and maybe even monthly routines have changed. **Which ones would you like to keep, even after restrictions on movement and physical contact end?**



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FAMILY

OLDER ADULTS

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Flexibility and adapting to change builds resilience in us all. During a crisis, our lives become disrupted. Family traditions and in-person celebrations may have been cancelled or postponed. We may seek continuity and connection. Changing or creating new traditions can restore stability and family connection. Sharing traditions connects us to each other by linking the past, present, and future.

These are some ways that older adults and their families can foster family traditions to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic.

Create or change a family tradition. What are some family traditions that can't be celebrated in the way they once were? What are other ways families can honor those traditions? For example, holiday cookouts, wedding showers, and other celebrations can be turned into virtual gatherings. Birthdays can be honored by organizing a car parade, decorating the person's home with birthday signs, or having social distanced visits.

When routines and plans are altered, it can also be a great opportunity to start something new. What's something the family has always wanted to do? It can be as simple as starting a pizza and movie night. Online platforms can make it possible for family members who are living away to join in the fun.

Share family meals in new ways. Maybe cooking and eating family meals together isn't possible right now. There are other ways families can experience the traditions and connection that comes from family meals. Some ideas are to:

- *Gather family recipes in one place.* It can be compiled into a cookbook, a collection of index cards in a recipe box, or a digital collection. Choose a recipe to make with a family member or friend on the same day. Share how it went, how it tasted, and what it reminded you of.
- *Write a recipe story.* There is often more to a recipe than ingredients and instructions. Do certain recipes bring back memories? Are there meals you only have at certain times of the year? How have recipes changed in the family over time? Including these details along with a recipe is a great way to preserve family history.
- *Make a new family recipe.* Family members can join in the effort even in separate homes. One idea is to make freezer jam. Making freezer jam is a great way to welcome spring and early summer crops like rhubarb, raspberries and strawberries. [Find a simple recipe here](#) — you only need a few ingredients!



FAMILIES

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SELF

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Coping with the unknown and navigating loss of income, abrupt changes in routines, loss of connections with friends, and fear around contracting the virus are challenges for everyone. Fear and uncertainty can cause stress and anxiety, and the “what-ifs” can be emotionally draining. This pandemic also has proven, however, that you are adaptable. Communities have adjusted quickly to changes in work and logistics, as well as socializing and engaging with friends and family. Give yourself a pat on the back for what all you have been able to accomplish with the new reality of living during COVID-19.

The pandemic has created uncertainty, but it is important to remember how it also has shown our ability to adapt and inspired creativity. Couples specifically, function best when they mutually value and support each other with flexibility and balance. Doing so can strengthen relationships and buffer against stress. Below are some tips for couples to remember while remaining flexible and adaptable during these times:

- **Find ways to connect throughout the day.** Check in between Zoom meetings or create new rituals like eating lunch together during the at-home workday. The most important aspect of this time is that work is put aside, the latest news headlines are not rehashed, and that couples and families are able to focus on positive time together.
- **Balance alone time and togetherness.** Couples need time together, but they also need time apart in order to recharge. Couples should approach what together and alone times will look like over the next few months. For example, partners might work in separate rooms during the day or sit quietly in the same room without interacting. The takeaway is that partners should give each other space for separate activities.
- **Rearrange chores.** It may be time to rearrange chores at home to make more sense given current schedules. Perhaps one partner has become the primary caregiver while children are home, or a partner has become the sole earner because of a lay off. Small acts of pitching in or modifying routines as needed can positively impact both partners. Instead of doing what worked pre-quarantine, partners should talk about what works now and leave room for flexibility when work or childcare schedules shift.
- **Remember self-care.** Many individuals are having to modify self-care strategies like going to the gym or going out with friends. As a result, partners may experience difficulty sleeping or concentrating. All these things can lead to conflict in a relationship. Self-care might be taking a walk (as a couple, as a family, or alone), preparing healthy snacks, talking on the phone with friends or family, meditation, or journaling.



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COMMUNITY

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Resilient communities find ways to share responsibility, guide and inspire one another. They also help neighbors to meet and tackle life's challenges. By making small changes, neighborhoods and communities can be flexible to change, adapt and thrive. In order to do this it is necessary for communities to find ways to adapt and promote connections that support financial wellness, mental health, warmth, affection, safety, and building strong lines of communication. Community resilience can also be fostered through relationships with others, organizations and local businesses.

This week's activities help support adaptation and the flexibility to change within a community. Helping others and fostering relationships is important to community resilience. Although each person's situation is different, when a community comes together with a positive outlook and the flexibility to make changes, there is a higher likelihood that the community will continue to thrive.

Neighborhood Help List

- Because of social distancing measures, many people are unable to do things they've normally done. It is important for those who do not have access to the resources they used to have, to know that there is help available. In order for a community to adapt to changing needs, it is vital to understand those needs. Consider inviting neighborhood members to create a "help list." The help list can include community member needs such as taking garbage cans to the curb, picking up groceries, or mowing the lawn. In addition, invite others to respond to the needs in an effort to work together to help. A good way to spread the word is by placing flyers on the porches of neighborhood members. These flyers can list needs and how to access those who are willing to help.

Donate to or Establish a Little Free Library

- Adapting to changing needs in a community can require thinking of new ways to help others. For community members young and old, a Little Free Library can be a convenient way to meet a need. A Little Free Library allows people the ability to place books they've already read in a public box. This box can then help those who need something to read. A Little Free Library is a great way to reuse and help others at the same time. [Find out more information about how to start a Little Free Library or how to locate libraries already in your area.](#)

Establish a Blessing Box

- For some community members facing food insecurity during this difficult time, accessing a food pantry can be difficult. For those community members, consider establishing a "blessing box." A blessing box is similar to a Little Free Library, but contains food and personal care items rather than books. With a blessing box, community members who need quick access to these items, but do not have the means, can find the items closer to home. This twist on a traditional food pantry is a way to adapt to help those who cannot travel during the pandemic. [Learn more about how to start a blessing box.](#)