



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
CHILDREN

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

As children are cooped up at home for longer periods of time, they may exhibit more challenging behaviors. Children who are acting out may actually be feeling nervous or restless. Family members play a huge role in helping children learn how to solve problems. This can also foster resilience! Learning how to solve problems can help children feel better as we spend more time together at home.

### Steps of Problem Solving

1. Identify the problem
2. Come up with some solutions
3. Think about what would happen
4. Try it out!

### Supporting Problem Solving

- **Let children make mistakes.** Part of problem solving is trying out different solutions. Even if you know something might not work, let children try it out. When a child's daily life is changed in ways they have no control of, it's important to allow them opportunities to take control.
- **Provide "just enough" help.** If your child is struggling or asks for help, provide just enough support to get them to the next step. Let them do as much as they can on their own.
- **Be a "sportscaster."** Encourage communication and problem solving by talking about what your child is doing. Example: If your child puts a block in the wrong hole while playing with a shape sorter, say "Uh, oh! You tried that hole, but the block doesn't fit. What can you do now?"
- For more ideas about how to encourage effective communication skills when solving problems:  
[https://www.focusproject.org/sites/default/files/family\\_resource\\_files/EffectiveComm\\_wc-508.pdf](https://www.focusproject.org/sites/default/files/family_resource_files/EffectiveComm_wc-508.pdf)

### Activity Ideas

Any activity can be an opportunity to work on problem solving. When children are bored or restless, an opportunity to try something new can help them to feel a renewed sense of accomplishment.

- **Infants/toddlers:** A change in routine can sometimes cause infants and toddlers to have more meltdowns. Sometimes trying something new can help ease frustration. Consider finding different child-safe containers and materials around your home (e.g. empty hummus container, wooden blocks). Provide items that may or may not fit into each other. Encourage your child to put things in and take them out. Include materials that make noise or have interesting textures.

- **Young children:** Use puzzles as an opportunity to talk things out. If you don't have puzzles at home, cut apart a picture from a magazine or newspaper. Encourage children to trace the edges of puzzle pieces to determine how they fit together. Encourage communication and problem solving. Example: "You looked frustrated when you couldn't get that piece to fit. You were frustrated earlier when we couldn't go see your friend Anna. What can we do to feel better when we are frustrated?"
- **Older children:** Practice communication and problem-solving skills while playing a cooperative board game. Example: "Oh wow! The card you picked says you need to pretend to be a robot brushing its teeth. What can you do to pretend to be a robot?" Below is a list of cooperative board games for all age levels.  
<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/cooperative-games-kids-family>
- **All ages:** Try to keep things positive. Instead of assigning daily chores that may be monotonous and cause possible aggravation, encourage children to choose a chore they are good at. Solve cleaning-up problems by working together to find something each person likes!



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

YOUTH

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Let's just be blunt — this pandemic sucks. It's scary and heartbreaking and has turned so many things upside down and all the contradictory advice about COVID-19 has not helped. Maybe you continue to hear from your tweens and teens that "it is hard to be at home with y'all" for 24 hours a day. Possibly you live in a community that is loosening restrictions and teens and tweens in your household begin to see this as a sign to "hang out" and reconnect with ALL their friends, but you would like them to slowly re-engage. As a family how do you navigate these discussions together?

You can do this. [Collaborative Problem Solving®](#) (CPS) can help.

**Reframing** is a tool for CPS. Making a habit of positive reframing can help us to develop better ways of thinking and behaving over time. Choosing to look for positive solutions to challenging circumstances enables us to cope better with those challenges and reduce stress. As parents, it's important to listen to how our children feel and let them vent. Then we can try to help them reframe the situation. With communication we can help our tweens and teens to understand that their feelings are important, but we need to try to look at things in a more positive, supportive and encouraging way. These kinds of conversations aren't easy, but they're necessary in helping young people to deal with things that cause them stress. Here are some examples:

*Example:* "My mom is always on my back since I've had to be home because of COVID-19."

*Reframe:* "I know my mom is really worried about a lot of things right now. She's just trying to make sure I'm safe by checking up on me."

*Example:* "I don't think I can take another day of being in this house!"

*Reframe:* "I really want to go out and do things with my friends and my family is driving me nuts! Maybe if I talk to one of my friends on the phone it will help me feel better."

This reframe enables a young person to perceive a different and more positive reality about why others behave the way they do and how it makes them feel. It further encourages the young person to respect other's needs in a shared household, to consider positive solutions and to assert their own wishes and needs within the household.

**Positive affirmations**, can be used to help build collaborative communications skills. These are short, positive, empowering statements that make things happen. To make them work they should be:

- Rehearsed regularly
- Phrased positively
- Framed in the present
- Used in the first person – "I" statements
- Focused on self-improvement, rather than compared to others
- Descriptive, action words that generate emotion and feeling
- Accurate, realistic and achievable



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- Visual prompts can be used such as a clock that will prompt action by a certain time
- Aimed at developing personal traits (concentration, self-control patience, etc)
- Focused on eliciting specific behaviors example: “I manage my time efficiently and effectively now” or “I’m fit and healthy and I really enjoy exercising on a daily basis”

Reframing adapted from <https://www.usc.edu.au/media/3850/Reframingyourthinking.pdf>

Positive affirmations adapted from <http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au/workers/youngpeople/feelings.html>



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
YOUNG ADULTS

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Things a little (or a lot) tense at home among the people you're living with? That only makes sense. After more than a month of sleeping and eating and working and (hopefully) relaxing all in the same place with all of the same people, conflicts are going to arise. But you have control over how you respond to those conflicts or how you repair them after they've occurred. And right now — in a time when so much is outside of all of our control, managing conflicts effectively for the sake of the group of people we live with can make all the difference in how this time passes.

### Enhancing Group Effectiveness

Researchers in many fields have investigated the effectiveness of groups and examined the relative importance of a variety of factors. The composition of groups in terms of similarities and differences among members (e.g., gender, race, personality traits, motivations, skills, ability levels) has been a key focus of study. Perhaps surprisingly, clear patterns have not emerged with regard to group composition.

Instead, a recent study by Google — entitled [Project Aristotle](#) — revealed that the *interpersonal interactions* within groups were much more important to group functioning than any specifics regarding group members or group composition. The single most important contributor to effective group work was a concept called *psychological safety*. Psychological safety is the belief that you can take risks in a group and that others will not embarrass you or put you down when you make mistakes.

Even if you are not a formal or informal leader of a group or your family, you can take direct actions that can foster psychological safety. For example, being supportive, recognizing other's efforts, asking for help, respecting people's boundaries and limits, and being open to feedback are all ways you can help make members of your group feel safer and function more effectively (Pawar, 2017).

### Video resources

- [https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_edmondson\\_how\\_to\\_turn\\_a\\_group\\_of\\_strangers\\_into\\_a\\_team](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_edmondson_how_to_turn_a_group_of_strangers_into_a_team)
- [https://www.ted.com/talks/frances\\_frei\\_how\\_to\\_build\\_and\\_rebuild\\_trust](https://www.ted.com/talks/frances_frei_how_to_build_and_rebuild_trust)

### Internal Actions

- Cultivate self-awareness and humility, which means being open to admitting that you are not always right and being curious about what others bring

### External Actions

- Open up a family conversation in which each person shares five things they need to feel more in control and settled





# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

OLDER ADULTS

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

How do we support the older adults in our lives and in our communities who are isolated? Especially when we ourselves might also feel isolated, overwhelmed or stressed. Solving problems like this together can:

- Strengthen our relationships
- Expand our resourcefulness
- Help us prepare for future challenges through successes and setbacks

Here are some ways that you and the older adults in your life can work together to cope with isolation and feel more connected:

**Send care packages.** Involve older adults by asking what they need. Some ideas of things to include are:

- Non-perishable food such as canned veggies, canned fruit, cereal and snacks
- Paper products such as tissue and toilet paper
- Cleaning supplies
- Health supplies such as over-the-counter medications

**Help older adults get set-up with technology communication platforms to stay connected.** The best platform to use can be different based on who needs to communicate. Asking older adults who they want to connect with and what kinds of technology their friends and family use is important. Ask older adults *how* they'd like to connect with others. Some ideas are:

- *Schedule a regular time with family and friends to chat or read stories.* For example, grandparents read to kids or grandkids read to grandparents.
- *Host a virtual book club.* Each week, one person can choose a book for everyone in the group to read. At the end of the week, schedule a video chat session to discuss the story.
  - [Some existing clubs](#)
  - [Some ideas for starting a new book club](#)
- *Schedule a movie night.* You might not be able to sit side-by-side on the couch right now, but you can still take in a movie with your loved ones. Streaming services like Netflix Party and Metastream will let you chat with each other while you watch your favorite flicks.
- [Play board games virtually.](#)

When it comes to problem solving, no idea or action is too small. The process of working together can foster connectedness. This is often just as important as the outcome.



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Right now, parents and caregivers are spending the majority of their day caring for others. Sometimes the stress of caregiving can impact our ability to problem solve. This week, we are exploring ways families can problem solve creatively, together!

Below are two activities that encourage creative problem solving:

### Family Meetings

Creative and successful problem solving is often done collaboratively. Family meetings are a great way for family members to creatively brainstorm about goals, expectations or conflict. Family meetings can provide a format for increased understanding, clearer communication strategies, positive steps toward solutions, and fun!

Here are a few things to remember when scheduling a family meeting:

1. **Establish a family meeting routine.** Parents/caregivers can decide on a regular meeting time.
2. **Be flexible about the format.** If everyone in the family is not able to meet in the same residence due to current conditions, family meetings can take place virtually or by phone to include all members.
3. **Create rules for the family meeting.** Have each person in the family suggest rules they think would be helpful. These may include things like: Only one person talks at a time, no electronic devices are allowed during the meeting, use only kind words, and respect each other's thoughts and opinions.
4. **Everyone should get to share.** Family meetings are a time for the whole family to talk about what kind of activities they want to do. Family meetings are also a great place to share and discuss conflicts in order to come up with a solution — like not leaving wet towels on the bathroom floor or picking up dirty clothes.
5. **Keep it positive.** When family members have different opinions, remind them to keep their comments and suggestions positive and to work together toward a solution. Parent(s) can offer praise, model encouragement and active listening, ask open ended questions, and support everyone in sharing.
6. **Finish with fun.** End the meeting by having everyone say one thing they learned or gained from the meeting. Close with an activity, a game, a story or a fun plan!

The content above was drawn from materials prepared by our external partners at Project FOCUS, Nathanson Family Resilience Center, University of California Los Angeles. We appreciate their generosity.

[https://focusproject.org/sites/default/files/family\\_resource\\_files/FamilyMeeting\\_wc-508.pdf](https://focusproject.org/sites/default/files/family_resource_files/FamilyMeeting_wc-508.pdf)

<https://focusproject.org/blog/planning-family-meeting>

### Cooking Creatively with Chef Dawn

As you think about “finishing with fun,” these cooking activities are a great way to get into the kitchen with your loved ones, problem solve ways to use ingredients in your house, and get a little messy! These activities, like family meetings, can happen virtually if not everyone is able to be together due to current circumstances.

Cooking as a family is a great way to use skills from the family meeting. For example, if everyone does not want the same toppings for the pizza, family members can practice listening to one another, respecting one another's thoughts and opinions, and using comments and suggestions to work together towards a solution. Maybe one pizza has more cheese, one pizza has more sauce, and one pizza is loaded with veggies.

Baking cookies is another great way to practice problem solving in the kitchen. For example, what happens when you add too much flour? Or when you make some cookies really big and others really small before putting them in the oven? Family members can be “detectives” and work together to problem solve how small changes in the baking process can impact the final outcome. Just as with baking, families can creatively problem solve around conflict, goals, and expectations to create a positive and healthy outcome.

Sometimes when we are feeling stressed, comfort food can go a long way in helping us feel better. The meaning of “comfort food” is different for each person: a kale and berry smoothie and a slice of fresh-from-the-oven pizza can both be comfort food. No matter the kind of comfort food, remember that exercise is a great partner. It’s okay to eat a slice of pizza when stressed, but consider pairing it with a brisk walk to burn off those extra calories and get some fresh air.

*Videos of recipes located at the back of this PDF*

- [Chicago Style Pizza](#)
- [Kitchen Sink Potato Chip Cookie](#)

#### *Family Resiliency Center Resources*

Our partners at the Family Resiliency Center at the University of Illinois have prepared [Mealtime Minutes](#), a series of 30-second videos with effective strategies for addressing common mealtime challenges and building quality shared time together. Here is one example:

- Many parents report that meal preparation is stressful. Planning ahead can help reduce feelings of stress and fatigue and lead to a better overall experience. <http://illinois.edu/cms/4445/food-mood.pdf>

Our Illinois partners also are producing a series of tip sheets focused on Building Blocks of Resilience. [Here is their guide for Cooking with Kids](#), which reports, based on recent scientific evidence, that involving children in cooking improves their later dietary habits, strengthens family relationships and improves well-being, can involve just about everyone in the family including young children, teaches science, and can get children to help more with cleanup!

#### *Additional resources for cooking with kids*

- [Exploratorium: The Accidental Scientist](#)
- [Chefs in Training: Getting Children Involved in the Kitchen from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#)
- [Cooking with Kids](#)





# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER

## Pizza

*Makes one deep dish 9" cake pan or two thin crust pizzas in a 425 °F oven (40 minutes deep dish/25-30 minutes thin crust)*

The crust and topping can be modified to your tastes with food you have in your pantry and fridge.

### Ingredients

2 1/2 cups	All-purpose flour (sub: bread, whole wheat, or high-gluten flour)
1/2 cup	Semolina flour (sub: cornmeal, oat-bran, cereal)
1 cup	Warm water (110°F)
2 teaspoon	Instant or active dry yeast (sub: 1.5 teaspoon baking powder)
1 teaspoon	Honey
1/2 teaspoon	Salt
2-3 cups	Assorted toppings, 2-3 cups total (cooked ground meat, grated cheese, tomato sauce, roasted or grilled vegetables)

### Directions

1. Mix water, yeast, honey. Mix dry ingredients; flour, semolina, salt in a medium bowl. Pour the water mixture into the flour mixture and mix well with hands, wooden spoon, whisk, or bowl scraper.
2. "Turn-out" your dough mixture onto clean board or table or countertop. "Spritz" a bit of flour if dough seems too sticky. Dough should feel very soft. "Knead" your dough for about 5 minutes.
3. Place your dough ball round into a lightly greased bowl (spray or brush with vegetable or olive oil). Also oil the top of the dough ball. Then cover with a plastic film or a clean, slightly damp towel. Allow to "rest" and "proof" for about an hour at room temperature until doubles in size. You may also choose to put your dough ball immediately into the refrigerator to stop the rise or proof until you are ready to bake your pizza. This can be left overnight and brought out to proof at room temperature the next day until doubles in size.
4. "Turn" your dough out onto a lightly floured surface and pull into a round shape. Or you may choose to cut the dough in half or four pieces and make smaller individual pizzas. Place your dough into a prepared cake pan, pie pan, sheet pan or bake on a pizza stone.
5. Place your choice of toppings in any order onto the pizza and bake in preheated 425 °F oven until golden brown. Remove from oven and allow to "rest" 5 minutes before cutting.

### Tasks for Children

Young children can help knead/shape the dough, spread the toppings and clean up. Older children can make the entire recipe. Oven work would be best for adults and teenagers.



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER

## “Kitchen Sink Potato Chip” Cookie

*Makes about 16 cookies in a 350°F oven*

This is a short-cake type cookie can be easily made with an assortment of goodies from your pantry! It is egg-free, and can be gluten-free, dairy-free, or nut-free if you choose.

### Ingredients

4 oz or 1 stick or 1 cup	Fat (margarine, Crisco, butter) softened at room temperature
1 small bag or 1 cup	Potato chips (any kind: Lay's, Miss Vickie's, Pringles)
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	All-purpose flour (sub: rice or coconut flour)
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	Granulated sugar
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	Salt
1 teaspoon	Extract (vanilla or your choice of other flavoring)
3-6 tablespoons	Assorted mixins (granola, chocolate chips, dried fruits, nuts, cookie crumbles, your choice!)

### Directions

1. Mix all ingredients in bowl with your hands until dough begins to form a ball. A few drops of water (1 teaspoon can be added if needed).
2. Make 12-16 equally sized “drop” ball cookies and flatten slightly with palm of your hand on a sheetpan that has been lightly greased or sprayed (can also use parchment or “Teflon Silpat”)
3. Bake your cookies about 15-20 minutes until light golden brown on the bottom and slight golden on the top edges.
4. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

### Tasks for Children

Young children would have fun picking out the mixings and helping mix the dough. Older children can make the entire recipe. Oven work would be best for adults and teenagers.



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



## COMMUNITY

### Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Our communities are affected by this pandemic in ways that might feel too great at times. Working with others to solve problems and focusing on what we can control can give us a sense of purpose and be useful to those in need — win-win!

You and your family can take part in solving the problems many of us are facing during this difficult time. Here are some ideas:

#### Bring groceries or supplies to those who need it

The [Invisible Hands project](#) is a group of volunteers who deliver groceries and supplies to those most at risk of COVID-19. Invisible Hands serves New York City, Jersey City, and select parts of greater NYC/NJ region.

#### Connect virtually with those who are most vulnerable and isolated

In many communities, [Adopt a Grandparent](#) programs connect volunteers with nursing home residents through regular video calls. Volunteers and residents are matched based on shared interests. It's a great way to build companionship! If you're interested in volunteering, here are some Adopt a Grandparent programs. You don't have to be local to join.

- [Creating Happiness Daily \(CHD\) Living](#)
- [City of Mesa, Arizona](#)
- Purdue Adopt-A-Grandparent Club

#### Join or start a letter-writing campaign

- The [Indian Women's Association](#) aims to connect older adults and families through art and letters. They are looking for e-cards, art, or letters from children and adults to send to six local nursing homes. One idea is to make a card at home with any kind of fun art and a short message, like "Have a great day," "Hugs," or "Happy Monday." Take a picture of it to make it an e-card! If you want to learn more or send an e-card, contact Lata Krishnan at [krishnal@purdue.edu](mailto:krishnal@purdue.edu).
- [Operation Gratitude](#) delivers handwritten letters to first responders, health care workers, and military members. Anyone can [register to write letters](#) on their website.

These are just a few ways communities have tackled some of the issues we are faced with today. When we ask questions and brainstorm with others it can open us up to new possibilities for overcoming challenges.