

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kamaria Morris,
Assistant Director, Communications & PR
Phone: 773.454.3590
Email: press@erikson.edu

Erikson Institute's early childhood experts share 10 tips for children and families navigating the COVID-19 outbreak



Chicago, March 26, 2020 — Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, parents, caretakers, and families across the world are navigating unprecedented challenges. Between school closings, social distancing, and fears of sickness, everyone is anxious and uncertain. To help, the expert faculty and staff of [Erikson Institute](https://erikson.edu), the nation's premier graduate school and policy hub focused on early childhood development, offer their top tips for children and families during this COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Take care of yourself first.** Right now, children are looking to the adults in their life for cues about how safe they are. Parents and caregivers with solid self-care routines can find it easier to be the role model a child needs. Self-care is important in the best of times, but especially now as people are dealing with extra worries surrounding the health and safety of their loved ones, their employment and finances, and the new complications of living during this time. Make sure you're finding healthy ways to cope, whatever that looks like for you. One important way is to reach out to the people in your life that you can talk to – staying connected can help us not feel alone in our struggles.

2. **Feel free to speak honestly and openly with children about the pandemic - but keep it simple and brief.** Children may not be able to understand *everything* going on during difficult times, but they usually do want to know something about it, and it helps when you explain it in ways they can understand. Reassure them they are safe and talk through their fears and concerns. Point out that there are people and systems in place responding to the crisis. In the words of Fred Rogers, “Focus on the helpers.”
3. **Do your best to let things go.** This is especially true when it comes to your own expectations for yourself. Take a cue from Elsa in *Frozen* and “Let it go!” Your work is not going to get done as usual, your house will not be as organized as it normally is, and your children’s schoolwork will not get completely done. Many parents feel they are functioning at a solid C- level, and that is OK.
4. **Try to keep a routine at home.** Kids, especially those under five, thrive on routine. It lets them know what’s going to happen next and helps them feel calmer and more in control. Having a visual schedule for younger kids doesn’t have to be complicated – breakfast, playtime, nap, lunch, etc. Let them come up with items to put on the calendar too – virtual playdates, or pillow fights at bedtime, for example. If you’re working from home, having a schedule for yourself that your children can see helps them know when you’re available to them.
5. **Schedule downtime for you and your family.** That means when it’s your time with the kids, try to put down your phone, email, or computer, and be 100% present with your children - even if it’s only for 30 minutes or an hour. In real estate, a common mantra is, “location, location, location.” With young children, it’s, “relationships, relationships, relationships.” Give them extra affection and provide them with relaxing and calming activities that can help them re-set their nervous systems into a better state. Consider an art or music activity.
6. **Children need lots of outdoor time.** When possible, and with warmer weather ahead, consider allowing children to play outside in a backyard or other monitored area. Since they cannot go into other children’s houses to play, the idea of families agreeing on a time and space where children can play gives everyone a way to not go crazy. Try conducting lessons or activities on a porch or in a yard area. And when possible, play with them! Child-driven, pretend play is a good way for children to work out difficult feelings and stresses and might provide clues for where they need your help.
7. **Spend time finding good, high-quality content for children to engage with.** That doesn’t mean it has to be exclusively educational-focused; try to find age-appropriate materials that hold their attention. When you can’t watch/use the technology with them, find content they can engage with on their own - this is often content that is rated a bit younger than their target age.
8. **Make a game of social distancing and hygiene.** This can make it more fun and also help children retain important information. Let them make posters or signs to put up as reminders, which can help them feel ownership and give them more motivation to follow the directions.
9. **Help the helpers.** Doing a project together to help other people can give children some sense of agency in this situation – like thank you emails or signs/drawings that can be sent to medical workers, hospitals, and grocery store workers. Think of what you want your child to remember most from this time and try to build in as much connectedness and joy as you can for them and for you.
10. **If you or someone in your family gets sick with the coronavirus, try to help children anticipate what will happen.** Illness during this time can absolutely add an additional amount of worry and stress on you and your children. Talk through what’s happening in words they can understand. If there’s something they can

do -like make a drawing, or sing a song over the phone- those are things that can help them feel less out of control. If you or your child gets sick, explain clearly what will happen step by step, and emphasize there are helpers working hard to make things better.

Erikson Resources:

Another critical resource for parents with young children is [Erikson’s Fussy Baby Network](#). If you are struggling to care for a baby who is fussy, crying excessively, or has difficulties sleeping or feeding, consider utilizing this service. **There are no fees for Fussy Baby services during “shelter in place” orders.** Our team of infant specialists are available Monday – Friday (9-5 p.m.) to support any parent with a child under age 1. They can be reached at 1-888-431-2229 or at fussybaby@erikson.edu, and can also set up remote phone and video chats.

Erikson’s [Center for Children and Families](#) is also offering therapy sessions with parents remotely (both video and phone) to provide emotional support to them in these most challenging times. They can be reached at 312-709-0508.

To interview an Erikson expert in early childhood development, infant/early childhood mental health, or early education, please contact Kamaria Morris at kmorris@erikson.edu or call 773-454-3590.

For more information, please visit www.Erikson.edu/coronavirus which serves as a central point for Erikson information and updates throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. We have the premier graduate school dedicated to child development. We provide direct services to our community’s children and families. We are leaders in influencing early childhood policy. We work tirelessly every day so that all children can achieve optimal educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being. At Erikson Institute, we know that investing in the early years of children will last a lifetime.

###