

Preschoolers and Parenting

Me: Did you wash your hands?

4-year-old: No.

Me: Why are your hands wet?

4: I licked them.

That should kill the germs.

Topics Covered

- Impact of COVID-19 on Preschoolers
- Strategies for parents
- Final Thoughts

Mindful Mondays

04/13/2020

Tell us about a young child but say “my co-worker” or “my friend’s co-worker” instead of their name. (Because, you know, this is reality now for some of us.)

Ex: My co-worker asked for yogurt and is now crying because I gave her yogurt.

My co-worker keeps trying to steal my computer while shouting “I want do business!”

Working from home with kids and the family.... expectation vs. reality.



Over the past few weeks I’ve heard a lot of complaints being sent to HR about these new messy coworkers that have invaded our workspaces, made messes of the office, and have stolen our lunches.

How are we supposed to get any work done?!

Life has been chaotic and hectic these past few weeks, and our youngest of kids are likely feeling that same chaos. As you’ll see below, that chaos may be expressed in different ways but is manageable when we, as the adults, are able to remain calm and collected as the leaders of our families.

Contact Me

Greater Lakes Child
Advocacy Center

95 Water Street
Laconia, NH

603-499-7504

Awolff@cac-nh.org



Impact on Preschoolers

- **Changes in routine**
 - Like school-age children and teenagers, our preschoolers are also dealing with a change in routine as preschools and daycares close to prevent further spread of the virus
 - This change alone can be enough to stir up uncomfortable feelings that lead to increased anxiety and tantrums
- **Increased contact with parents or guardians**
 - It's a new and exciting time for younger kids that don't always get to see their parent or guardian between the hours of 8 and 4
 - That excitement may be hard to contain, and younger kids will often show it through:
 - Increased hyperactivity
 - Limit testing
 - Rambunctious behavior
- **Exposure to increased sibling, parent, and family emotions**
 - Anxiety, frustration, tension, stress, isolation, sadness, etc. these feelings are likely running through household across the world whether we'd like to admit it or not
 - Young children can feel, sense, and observe these emotions even when it seems like they're not around
 - Exposure to these emotions is okay as long as we are showing healthy ways to cope and express them
- **Questions, questions, questions**
 - With change comes questions regarding the impact of the change
 - Depending on the age of your child be prepared for an increase in their who, what, where, when, why, and hows
 - It is okay for them to be curious and ask questions
 - Be observant and mindful of any consistent themes in their questioning as persistent questioning regarding specific topics may indicate the presence of anxiety
 - Example: When a young child consistently asks if he or she is going to get the coronavirus
- **Other regressions in behavior:**
 - Hitting and aggression towards siblings
 - Problems falling and staying asleep
 - Clingy behavior with a parent and/or toy
 - Change in toilet habits
 - Frequent crying

Below you will find helpful strategies to address preschooler behaviors and other concerns that arise as a result of COVID-19's impact on daily life. Many of these strategies have been presented before but can apply to children from all age groups. The ultimate goal through all of this for parents is to help make the uncertain certain again by increasing predictability in your child's environment, showing attentive love and affection to your child, and taking care of yourself as a parent and/or guardian. Doing so will may help make some of the harder days feel much better.

Parent Tweets about their “Coworkers”

My co-worker keeps wearing the same thing to work. Like every day. And it's an Elsa costume dress.

My sister's co-worker took a bite out a lunch sandwich and then sobbed because it was no longer whole like her siblings'

My co-worker threw herself on the floor wailing
CHEEEEEEESECAAAAAAKE after I told her we were out of cheesecake.

My coworker disavows any knowledge of silly putty behind the couch cushions.

My coworker just threw his muffin wrapper on the floor and is now proceeding to sit on the floor spreading muffin crumbs all over the carpet. I can't find it in me to care.

My co-worker asked me to lift her on to the toilet and when I said she was big enough to go herself, she made the L for loser sign at me.

Two of my co-workers have very loud sword fights EVERYDAY that start with giggles and end with one or both of them screaming and crying. And they insist that the rest of their co-workers witness the battle.

I attempted to bribe my co-workers with Twix bars to stay quiet while I was on my first conference call of the day. Both co-workers accepted said bars and proceeded to scream at each other during my entire conference call.

My coworker stole my cheezits from my lunch bag and just walked around eating them and making eye contact with me

My co-worker is demanding I make her a Hot Pocket for lunch because she ate one grape.

My coworker just stuck his finger in his mouth and rubbed it down my arm. I'm calling HR.

My coworker keeps asking me for Cheeze It's and applesauce ALL DAY (which he spilled on the couch) and not once has he offered to top off my coffee!

Strategies for Parents

- **Develop a predictable at home routines**
 - Predictability will lend itself to your child feeling safer and more prepared for his or her day reducing the likelihood of tantrums and anxiety
- **Be a role model!**
 - Make sure you are modeling the same behavior you'd like to see your child use
 - The same can be said for how we express and cope with emotions
 - Use your coping skills, take deep breaths, and model patience through the frustrations and stressors
- **Support transitions with these tips:**
 - Use previews and countdowns
 - Have a conversation with your child about what is going to happen next and how it will happen
 - It seems tedious, but it is very beneficial in helping your child feel safe and secure during periods of uncertainty
 - Highlight a reinforcement for positive behavior at the end for extra motivation
 - Example: "In 5 minutes we are going to go into the grocery store. When we are in the store, you hold my hand and use your inside voice. If you do a good job in the store you can pick a candy at the register"
 - Countdowns can help your child regulate and prepare themselves for the transition
 - Example: 15, 10, 5-minute warnings before transitions
 - Make a song or jingle
 - I always think back to the "clean up, clean up, everybody clean up" song my preschool used to transition us from activity to activity
 - Get creativity and think of some songs/jingles for difficult transition periods for your child
- **Use “Same” and “Different” language**
 - Given the changes, highlight what aspects of life are the same and what aspects are different to your child
 - Doing so will speed up their processing and understanding of how life may be different or the same
 - Make a game out of it and challenge them to look for or identify things that are the same or different
- **View behavior as communication**
 - Young children have a difficult time communicating their thoughts and feelings and will often tell us how they feel through their behaviors
 - Rather than viewing your child's behavior as intentional misbehavior try changing your perspective to "what is my child communicating to me when they do this?"
 - Doing so may help you identify something going on in your child's mind or environment that is leading to their misbehavior
- **Set limits and have clear expectations**
 - Kids need help to learn what their roles and expectations are when they are home during work hours
 - Help your child understand by communicating clear limits and expectations for behavior
 - Sometimes using visuals for younger children is more helpful than words
 - Example: Pictures of a child playing and then pictures of a child picking their toys up after playing

- **Use timeouts and logical consequences**

- Timeouts

- Precede timeouts with a warning
- Follow the 1 minute for every year rule
- Identify a place that your child will remain safe in that does not have access to toys or other things that may reinforce their behavior
- If they are being safe, ignore any tantrums that may come along with the timeout
- Timers may be beneficial to help show your child how long the timeout is

- Logical consequences

- These are consequences that a child may earn in response to a behavior
- For young kids, consequences could look like:
 - Jumping on the couch means practicing how to sit calmly on the couch
 - Making a mess means cleaning up (with adult help depending on the age)

- **Attention is a powerful reinforcement, use it wisely**

- Attention reinforces both positive and negative behaviors, when we are mindful of how we give our attention we are more likely going to reinforce positive behaviors rather than the negative behavior
- Attention can also help fill our children with feelings of love, happiness, and security
 - The effect of these feelings can be long lasting in a child's mind and provides them with enough comfort to engage in independent activities for a longer period before needing your support or attention again
 - Fill their attention cups early and often when you work from home!
 - Even 5 minutes of 1 on 1 play will go a long way if given multiple times a day

- **Redirections and corrections**

- It is natural and developmentally appropriate for children to misbehave, test limits, and seek our attention during these uncertain times
- When you are mindful of what your child is communicating to you through their behavior you can then rely on redirecting their behavior to an alternative
 - Example: running around the house uncontrollably could be redirected to structured exercise or playtime outside where there is more space to run around
- Correcting misbehavior is also important so we can teach children the appropriate behavior
 - Parents may often say "no don't do that" to correct a child, but that often leaves the child confused as to what to do instead
 - When correcting a behavior make sure to indicate what your child should/could do instead of the negative behavior
 - Try to role play the correct behavior to help further clarify your expectations
 - Praise and reinforce any successful attempts at using the appropriate behavior

- **Use the power of storytelling!**

- Story telling gives your child attention and can help soothe anxiety
- Story telling also provides learning opportunities for your child
- There are plenty of story resources available to parents online to teach them about COVID-19, social distancing, etc.
- Here is one example of a story and how it can be used:
 - [Something Strange Happened In My City](#)

- **Provide answers to their many questions**

- The younger the child, the more direct and simple the answer should be
- If you don't know the answer, let them know you don't know and that you will find the answer and let them know once you have it
- Here is a link to typical questions kids may have as a result of COVID-19 and the disruptions it has caused:
 - [Answering Your Young Child's Questions](#)

- **Take care of yourself**

- The number one thing kids need in uncertain times is a parent or guardian to ground (not the punishment) them and keep them feeling physically & emotionally safe
- Make sure you are doing what you need to do to reduce feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed before attempting to calm your child down
 - Make time for your own self-care
 - Time apart from your child may be difficult during these times, but it is important to schedule a "break" for yourself
 - If you are co-parenting work together as a tag-team and take turns being the primary parent to allow each other breaks
 - If you are a single parent, rely or institute "quiet" times or nap times to help you recharge as well
- Sometimes it gets hard to keep our composure and that is okay
 - Let those times be honest times where you can teach your kids how to express when they have hit their limit and what to do at that moment
 - Example: "I'm feeling a bit worried right now. I'm going to take a few deep breaths to help make it better. Would you like to sit with me, and we can take deep breaths together?"

Public Service Announcement

Parents: What we are being asked to do is not humanly possible. There is a reason we are either a working parent, a stay-at-home parent, or a part-time working parent.

Working, parenting, and teaching are three different jobs that cannot be done at the same time.

It's not hard because you are doing it wrong. It's hard because it's too much. Do the best you can.

When you have to pick, because at some point you will, choose connection. Pick playing a game over arguing about an academic assignment. Pick teaching your child to do laundry rather than feeling frustrated that they aren't helping. Pick laughing, and snuggling, and reminding them that they are safe.

If you are stressed, lower your expectations where you can and virtually reach out for social connection. We are in this together to stay well. That means mentally well, too.

Emily W. King, Ph.D.

Final thoughts:

That just about wraps up our series on parenting different ages of children during these uncertain times. I hope you all have found these tips and strategies useful in your interactions with your kids and teens. You are all working so hard and cannot be commended enough for what you do for your children, keep up the amazing work!

Continue to focus on how you can foster and build those connections with your children as we proceed through the rest of this month, the benefit will be long-lasting.

P.S.

I've made it a point to let the memes and tweets do some of the talking because even through the humor they have a way of touching upon all our realities in a normalizing and validating way. I couldn't help myself with this one:



*Andrew Wolff, M.S., LMFT
Mental Health Clinician*
