

BONDING WITH GRANDCHILDREN DURING A PANDEMIC

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WHAT HAS THIS PANDEMIC MEANT FOR YOU?

- Life has changed, but how, in particular, has it changed for you?
- Who do you see/spend time with?
- What activities can you still do, and are there new things you do?
- What do you tend to think about during the day?
- What do you dream about at night?
- What things worry you the most right now?
- What things are you most looking forward to when this is all over?

THE VERY REAL WAYS WE CAN MISS ONE ANOTHER

A recent study found that 69 percent of grandparents hadn't met their new grandchildren since the end of March and 76 percent hadn't hugged or touched any of their grandchildren in the same period. For many grandparents, this is taking a toll.

Moms and dads are struggling without family support during the pandemic. Parents are struggling without receiving visits and food, and sharing special moments with grandparents.

IN TIMES OF STRESS...

- We tend to use our more primitive defensive brain.
- This curtails the use of the more-highly organized, intelligent part of the brain.
- We become more attuned to immediate survival, and less to the abstract future.
- We opt for simple and swift as opposed to complex and thoughtful reactions.



This can make it very hard to connect with one another

STRESS AND THE BODY

- Stress acts as a warning system - Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn
- First, external events create the stress.
- Then, internal events create, enhance and maintain stress and anxiety:

Pessimism

Unrealistic expectations

Negative self-talk

Perfectionism

Inability to accept uncertainty

HOW DO CHILDREN PROCESS FEAR?

- Can take a toll on a child's growth and development.
- More difficult for them to understand and process with less:
 - Vocabulary
 - Life experience
 - Resiliency
 - Perspective
 - Resources

COMMON EFFECTS OF STRESS ON KIDS

- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness
- Avoidance
- Survival Coping
- Social Withdrawal
- Minimizing
- Anger or Cynicism
- Sleeplessness
- Illness
- Fear
- Chronic Exhaustion
- Physical Ailments
- Disconnection
- Poor Boundaries
- Loss of Creativity
- Difficulty Listening
- Diminished Self-Care
- Inability to Embrace Complexity

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP KIDS FEEL SAFE?

Connect and Redirect - Connect Right Brains and then help them integrate left brain logic, lessons, and perspective

Name it to Tame It - You can help kids feel more control over their experience by helping them put it into words

(From Dan Siegel's book The Whole Brain Child)

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP KIDS FEEL SAFE?

Focus on the silver linings

Any time we are forced outside our “comfort zone” by unwelcome circumstances, we are forced to stretch our own boundaries. In the long run, each of us will discover surprising **new strengths and skills**. This is time to share what you’re doing that’s new, and to ask your grandchildren about.

Share the “long view”

This is an exceptional time, but children can benefit greatly from the perspective that grandparents can bring from their own experience and the **shared history of the family, generation to generation**.

We are here today, in this time, not because life was always easy before now, but because when something unexpected (even catastrophic) happened, we figured out how to help ourselves and each other through.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP KIDS FEEL SAFE?

Manage your own anxiety

How we manage our anxiety has a big impact on our kids. Keeping your worries in check will help your whole family navigate this uncertain situation as easily as possible.

For those moments when you do catch yourself feeling anxious, try to avoid talking about it within earshot of children.

HOW CAN WE STILL GET TOGETHER IN PERSON?

- Pick an uncrowded spot that's within a day's trip and where there has been limited community spread of the virus.
- Public parks are often great for this- Pumpkin picking, Hiking, Fishing, Camping...
- Remember: the best tools we have right now to protect each other from the spread of the novel coronavirus and the flu are masks (worn over the nose and mouth), hand-washing and maintaining social distance.

HOW CAN WE STILL HAVE FUN TOGETHER VIRTUALLY?

- 1. Make it a social, interactive experience.** Try dance parties, games and scavenger hunts.
- 2. Use props.** Encourage the screen partner to read one of the child's favorite books, as the child follows along with his own copy. Or, the video partner can play with the same kinds of toys that the child is. Share interesting youtube videos or news clips. Sharing a snack after school together is a favorite too.
- 3. Explain any technical difficulties.** Explaining these experiences helps children better understand both the technology and the interaction. It can also help screen partners adjust factors on their side (like the angle of their webcam) to improve the video chat.
- 4. Let children take the lead with the technology as they grow.** For example, by the time your grandkids are in first or second grade, they can probably spend time teaching you some things about technology and their virtual world.

YOU CAN USE THIS EXPERIENCE TO HELP BUILD EMOTIONAL MUSCLE!

- Distress tolerance
- Compassion and patience towards each other
- Sometimes it's okay to not be okay
- Constructive boredom - embracing less structured time
- Wider range of coping skills (rather than just distraction)
- Grit

THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

It's worth remembering - and reminding each other - our **values** and our **faith**, and from both of these, the centrality of **family** in the long history of the Jewish people. These are an important part of our shared heritage, our DNA. One might say that in many ways, we are unusually well prepared to weather the challenges of this time.

Consider how you can relate this to your grandchildren.