



Day 16 of the Corona Virus Lock Down

Well it looks like it will be a long month of social distancing and sheltering in place. Let's congratulate ourselves on handling this massive disruption to our daily schedules and showing our great reserve and perseverance. Take a moment today and tell yourself "good job." Really mean it! Say it out loud so that you hear yourself. Remember, by us taking these unprecedented steps to shelter in place and remain socially distant, we are making a difference and this change is impacting our new normal with favorable outcomes.

A few days ago, it was clear to me that I could contribute to this war effort by using my counseling skills as a way to support the army of foster parents who are dealing with their own front lines. Although my skills are not needed at the hospitals to help save lives, I can offer support that might save frazzled nerves and keep tempers from boiling over. I want to offer you encouragement and share some ideas for managing a house full of kids. I hope that my years of working with adolescents will give you some insight toward working through their crisis of the moment and keeping peace in the household.

A child's sense of urgency is different than an adult's. Just as a child might not see the urgency to clean his room or take a shower, that same lack of awareness translates to how he might respond to this national crisis. Over the past few weeks, your adolescent might be his regular old self. He might look at this as one big vacation from school. But his mood can change the longer we shelter in place. With fewer outlets for socializing and engagement, the extroverted child might begin to get irritable. He may become depressed and disengaged from the family's efforts to make the best out of this situation. A remedy might be to give him ample alone time, but there should always be an agreement that the child also spends some time with the family. Bring all the household members together for an activity. Keep the event scheduled and consistent. It might be a family Bible study; a group sing; games night or a good movie. There's no one-size-fits-all, but the importance of building community through family time can counter an adolescent's desire to isolate.

An introverted child might show a different way of being stressed. By his nature, the introvert might enjoy alone time and so a shift in personality might be difficult to read. What might look like his ordinary pattern of separation might actually be an unhealthy approach at internalizing feelings. He may be holding onto thoughts that he's cultivated from snippets of news and social media that have him confused, lost and scared. He may be concerned for the safety of certain people in his biological family (even if he hasn't seen these people in years). Now, more than ever, the child needs to know he has a safe place to go to talk. He needs to feel his environment is safe and free from judgment. I'd encourage the caregiver to ask questions that can lead to conversations. Ask him how he feels about what's going on. Even take a stretch and ask him if he's scared someone he loves might become sick. Giving the child permission to express his feelings can help him process and reconcile his emotions.

During the month of April, my hope is to share a few posts each week. If you have questions or ideas for topics that I can write on feel free to respond to my email or give me a call.

Wishing you continued health and happiness,

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