



PARENTING in Hard Times

10 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Did you get the manual for parenting in hard times? Don't worry – we didn't either.

The good news is we can take care of our kids without having all the answers to what lies ahead. What matters most to kids is being able to lean on an adult who will be their answer to comfort, contact, and closeness. Research on resiliency consistently demonstrates that kids do better under stress when they have one strong, caring, emotionally available adult to connect to.

A close relationship with an adult is a 'safety bubble' in a world that has turned upside down and when there is a sense of alarm everywhere. Children will follow their adults to wash their hands, to stay inside, to play, to read stories, to learn – all because of your relationship to them.

AS YOU NAVIGATE HARD TIMES, THE FOLLOWING TEN THINGS MIGHT HELP TO KEEP IN MIND



1 LEAD

When there is a sense of alarm everywhere kids need to know who is in charge and who will take care of them. We need to demonstrate we can handle their emotions, thoughts, and behaviour in a caring way so they will trust and follow us.

2

COLLECT

Deepen your relationship by engaging their attachment instincts and collecting their eyes, a smile, or a nod in agreement. Connect with them often and put the focus on delight, enjoyment, and warmth. Listen with full attention and focus on what is important to them.



3 STRUCTURE

Routines help you and your kids know what to expect each day and will bring some comfort by providing order to the disorder. Predictability helps with uncertainty. Routines can help reduce resistance in kids and make it easier to transition them from one task to another, for example, getting homework to chores done.

4

FRUSTRATION

Expect more frustration and upset in your kids when little things don't work out. Be patient, draw out their words for what isn't working or needs to change, lead them to play, or to their tears. Hard times can stir up more hard feelings.



5 PLAY

There is nothing as powerful as play to release pent up emotions, especially when there are no words to describe how you are feeling. Emotional playgrounds include music, dance, movement, art, building, sewing, singing and anything that doesn't have an outcome required. Play + stress = REST

6

SCHOOL

Learning may still be possible in hard times but don't let it get in the way of your relationship. What matters most in times of stress are not grades but connection and emotional safety. Put the focus on leading them to play as well as learning, knowing that both are needed in the long-run.



7 SCREENS

These are often used as digital babysitters for a child but there are ways to use them to preserve connection with adults as well as to encourage true play. You can help your child talk to their teacher online, read a book with an aunt or uncle, or play with other kids online by showing them their favourite things or pets.

8

BRIDGE

As our kids face separation from the people and things they are attached to you can help them feel connected to what they are missing by bridging the distance. Put the focus on good memories, look at pictures, drive by familiar places, and convey faith that this time is just a blip in their big, beautiful life.



9 SPACE

Take time and space to catch your breath and to gather your thoughts. Getting through hard times is a marathon and not a sprint. Your kids will need some time on their own too – away from other siblings and stimulation through screens. Everyone needs more rest when they are under stress.

10

GUILT

Expect guilt, it is the 'bodyguard' emotion that sits on top of feelings of frustration and sadness. When we are overwhelmed it is common to feel we are not doing enough as a parent. When you put your feelings into words and tell other adults, or have a good cry, or find some expression through play, then the feelings of guilt will settle and you will be restored again.



No one has the answers in times of great stress and change. It is not about making sense of things when you are in the middle of the storm but facing each day with courage as the storm continues on.

While we may not know what lies ahead, our future will be better because we focused on:

- 1 Keeping our relationships strong and leading our kids
- 2 Making room for play to blow off emotional steam
- 3 Letting our tears take care of the rest



Dr Deborah MacNamara
(www.macnamara.ca)

- @drdeborahmacnamara
- @debmacnamara
- @deborahmacnamara