



From Canada's bestselling
and most trusted parenting author,
a guide to parenting without
anxiety, guilt, or feeling overwhelmed



The Virtual Village Part II: Caring for Your Kids

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 @ 7:30 pm

**Presented by Erin Mills Connects
Featuring Ann Douglas**

Why so many children are struggling right now—and how parents can help to make things better

- Children are dealing with changes to their usual routines.
- Children are picking up on adults' elevated levels of anxiety.
- Children are listening to news stories and/or overhearing conversations about the pandemic.
- We can help children to manage their fears by sharing information in an age-appropriate way, correcting any misinformation they may have heard, and letting them know that they have an opportunity to make a difference—to do things to help keep themselves and other people safe.

How to help your child to feel calmer and less anxious

- Calm yourself; calm your child. Be a calming presence in their lives. Be their safe place; their “person.”
- Give your child the opportunity to talk about what they are thinking/feeling.
- Try not to be triggered by annoying behaviour. Instead, remind yourself that behaviour is communication. What is your child's behaviour trying to tell you? What does your child really need from you right now?
- Encourage a child who is particularly anxious to take mini-vacations from the worry and to park some of their worries with you.
- Maintain the reassuring rhythm of everyday life.
- Anxiety becomes a problem (and may be diagnosed as an anxiety disorder)
 - when it arises suddenly and unexpectedly, for no apparent reason, or is rooted in worry about something that is highly unlikely to happen;
 - when it doesn't seem to be proportional to the situation or problem;
 - when it is far-reaching and long-lasting (it feels impossible to control or manage and is affecting the child's ability to function).



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How to help your child to tap into support from other people

- Help your child to understand that reaching out for support from other people is a powerful way to deal with difficult situations.
- Encourage your child to build a “village” of support: a network of supportive relationships that can serve as a resource in times of struggle.
- Help her to see how she can be “the village” for other people.

How to help your child to manage feelings of disappointment

- Accept and acknowledge your child's feelings.
- Challenge yourself to respond with empathy: to try to see the situation from your child's point of view.
- Validate your child's emotions. Let your child know that her feelings make sense.
- Then, when she's ready, encourage her to switch into problem-solving mode. Maybe there's a way to make the situation a little less awful.
- Help your child to hold on to hope that things will get better. Things won't always be this hard.

Some final thoughts

- Stress and anxiety are a fact of life for all of us. No one is immune!
- Parents have a key role to play in helping children to develop stress management and coping skills.
- Some children may require a little extra help in learning how to tame their anxious brains.
- Focus on what your child needs most from you in this moment: to feel safe and secure; supported and loved.

Ann Douglas sparks conversations that matter about parenting. She is the weekend parenting columnist for CBC Radio and the creator of Canada's bestselling series of pregnancy and parenting books, *The Mother of All* book series. Her most recent books are *Happy Parents*, *Happy Kids* and *Parenting Through the Storm*.



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Activities that Encourage Children to Open Up About Their Emotions

Looking for some ways to bring some of the concepts discussed in this presentation to life for yourself and your child? Here are some games and activities you might want to try together.

Game: Emotion Detective

It's easier to make sense of emotions once you understand the concept of triggers—the idea that emotions can be brought on by something that's happening inside you or outside you. To help your child to understand that there's sometimes some detective work involved in figuring out what's triggered another person's emotions, give your child the opportunity to play emotion detective. The next time you're reading a book or watching a movie together, ask your child to suggest some reasons why a particular character might be exhibiting a particular emotion. Did something happen to him? Is he thinking about something? What are some other possibilities? Can your child think of situations from in his life when he reacted in a similar way?

Activity: Emotion Collage

Encourage your child to tap into everything that she's feeling by creating an emotion collage made up of words and images that capture her emotions. Use this collage to spark conversations with your child about emotion. Your child needs to know that every emotion is acceptable and that you care about how she is feeling; that you are a safe haven where she can turn for support and understanding on days when she's feeling flooded by emotions that are too big for her to handle on her own.

Activity: Coping Strategies Roadmap

You can get there from here (with *here* being where you are right now, feeling stressed and overwhelmed, and *there* being the much happier and calmer place where you hope to be soon.) This activity asks your child to identify the coping strategies that will allow him to make inroads on that journey. For some kids, it might mean engaging in some sort of physical activity to help them burn off steam; for other kids, it might be reaching out for support from a parent or a friend for help in making sense of their emotions. For added fun, create a coping strategies roadmap for yourself so that you and your child can talk about how you're both different and the same when it comes to coping with challenging emotions.

Activity: Emotion Journal

Help your child to make sense of her most intense and overwhelming emotions by keeping an emotion journal. Encourage her to identify situations that cause her particularly difficulty so that she can learn how to spot and manage the associated



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emotional triggers. Make sure she notes situations that she handles particularly well as opposed to simply zeroing in on situations where she stumbled. You want her to be able to celebrate the progress she's making in learning to make sense of and manage her emotions. And you want her to understand that everyone needs to make a conscious effort to making their emotions work for (and not against) them. This skill doesn't necessarily come easily to anyone and we don't develop this skill overnight. But it is a skill that we can acquire with practice over time. And that's good news for all of us—kids and grownups alike.