

Supporting Clinicians Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Tip Sheet: Supporting Spouses/Partners/Significant Others of Physicians



If you are a physician who needs support for your family, here are some tips to help you and your family during this time.

- **Take care of YOU first.**
 - You must be a priority.
 - Everything you do creates a ripple effect of yourself and affects others.
 - Eat well, sleep, exercise, engage.
 - Remind yourself of your purpose and meaning and why you do what you do.
- **Be present with family.**
 - When you are at work, be at work. When you are home, be at home.
 - Engage with everyone in your family including the pets
 - Have family discussions
 - Share emotions and concerns without trying to fix anyone's feelings
 - Declare and demonstrate that family is a priority – state it and spend time with them
 - Share group ideas
 - Appreciate differences
- **Organize family functions.**
 - Delegate and share activities that must get done.
 - Develop a new family schedule and stick to routine as much as possible.
 - Change up routines when needed but just slightly.
 - Think ahead and plan for family time and individual time or pet time.
- **Engage family in decision making.**
 - Include those who can talk – spouse/partner/significant other, adolescent kids, and even kids as young as 2-4 can contribute
- **Do things together and apart**
 - Ideas include family game time, reading time, journaling, scavenger hunts, gardening, chores, etc.



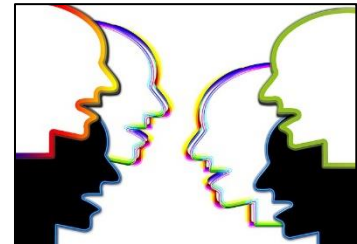
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- Separate if possible, for time alone. For younger kids and infants, have quiet time or sleep when they nap. Make sure to keep them on a schedule but be flexible to avoid feelings of hurt or anger if they are fussy.
- For younger kids – do what you always do – read to them, have fun, laugh, color, etc.
- For older kids do much of the same but engage them more in the discussions and decisions.
- Keep in mind that you don't always have to DO something or TALK about something, sometimes just hanging out with your family is meaningful
- There is an old saying "it's not the quantity of time, it's the quality of time that matters." BOTH quantity and quality time matter. Teens, especially, need to just hang out to allow them to open up about what they are experiencing.
- The best advice ever: LISTEN to your spouse, to your children, to your friends. Listen with no agenda and without trying to fix anything that they are saying.

- **Engage tweens and teens.**
 - Tweens and teens are tech savvy and can contribute to family activities in many ways
 - Engage the tweens and teens in the discussions of what family activities they want to do.
 - Be in their world – allow them to teach you what they like, what are their favorite YouTubers and why, how to use Instagram, Tik Tok, etc.
 - Play and create your own house in Sims.
 - They really want independence and respect – so allow them to call the shots (within reason) for a family activity.
 - Share with each other who you are:
 - Discuss your love languages
 - Share your preferred communication styles
 - Identify introverted and extroverted tendencies
 - Discuss how each person loves to be loved.
 - Discuss faith and beliefs in a sharing format where there are no right or wrong ways/answers.

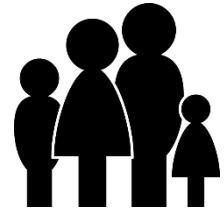
- **My favorite family suggestions:**
 - Reading:
 - Parents read the five love languages and if you have adolescents, read the five love languages for teens (a must read for any parent with a child at least 10 years old to 21 years old). Read books on marriage and relationships by Gottman or Five Star Families, build individual emotional intelligence by reading Goleman books or Ming Tan's Search Inside Yourself.



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- As a family – read interesting books together with the kids such as the Percy Jackson or Harry Potter series. (even if they read it – read it together as a family – take turns reading sections or chapter especially if you have adolescents in the home)
- Listen to books on tape or audible, etc. Listen together.
- Individual: What are those books you always wanted to read but never had time to? Get them, download them, etc. and include on your individual reading list.
- Game night:
 - Charades, the Game of Life, Trouble, Uno, Cards Against Humanity, Watch your Mouth, Catch Phrase, etc.
 - Wii or PlayStation
 - Other video games on the computer or phone
- Chore Time:
 - Take 20 minutes for chore time – select one area to work on or partner up and see who gets the cleanest room – offer rewards to the winners.
 - Family clean – for communal areas – consider family cleans – for younger kids use the Barney clean up song, for older kids allow them to play their favorite songs.
 - Family cleans can go outside as well.
- TV time:
 - Find fun family shows to watch together – movie time or series time. Binge watch the whole session of Blackish – laugh and talk about how it relates to your family.
 - Watch a foreign movie or k-drama to support time together and includes reading – obviously not for toddlers. 😊
 - But you can teach toddlers new words and songs in different languages – we loved French and Spanish songs in the fun tunes you know and love and watch how fast they pick it up.
 - Autobiographies and documentaries can also be fun, especially if linked to something your child is learning in history or science.
- Crafting time:
 - Build fun together when you become creative and inspired. Use a YouTube video to follow a painting and everyone has their own paper to color or crate.
 - Find things you need as a solution or decoration for your house or the teens rooms and create it from trashed items like cardboard tubes or egg cartons, etc.
 - Color, paint, draw, write/journal outside and use nature as your inspiration



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- Paint fun things like rocks from the garden, poster boards for each room, activity clip boards, or use a canvas and have everyone in the family add to the painting for an extraordinary family-deigned picture for the family room. Get creative and see what the family comes up with.
- Look up activities on the web, Pinterest, etc. to find family activities.
- Family sign-a-longs
 - List and sing songs together
 - Watch favorite musical group videos
 - Dance to each family members' favorite song
 - Try ballroom dancing together or watch YouTube videos to learn hip hop dance moves together
 - Stretch yourself – listen to a song from a genre you don't like as much – share what everyone likes or doesn't like about it
- Family reflections:
 - Share emotions and challenges and just listen to each other.
 - Family sculps – in this activity, each family member has a turn to place every other family member into a pose that reflects how they view that person in the family. This one is a great way for kids to have a voice and parents may learn what their kids are thinking.
 - Journaling together as a family
 - Sharing gratitude each day – making a family list
 - Practice mindfulness activities together
- Exercise together:
 - Dance, ride bikes, walk, do Zumba, Pilates, yoga, Tai Chi, etc.
 - Weight lift
 - 30 second rotation stations – jumping jacks, squat thrusts, burpees, stretching, etc. – each member is at a different station for 30 seconds. When time is up, everyone changes/rotates clockwise to the next station until everyone has completed each station. Select how many rounds the family wants to do and the time. (example: 5 stations are equivalent to 2 min and 30 seconds; thus, two cycles equals 5 minutes)



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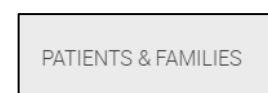
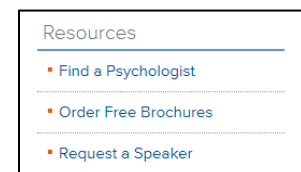
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- **Stay connected to distant relatives.**
 - Schedule family facetime/zoom nights
 - Create and send happy cards to those family members who live apart from your family unit
 - Play games over the internet together
 - Have Sunday dinners together via the internet (Zoom, Facetime, Duo chat, WhatsApp, WebEx, free conference calls, etc.)
- **Help your spouse/partner/significant other know they too may need help:**
 - When you are in touch with his/her feelings, you can ask if they need help.
 - If they think they could benefit from help, offer/suggest he/she seek counseling, coaching, or see the physician.
 - If he/she is not interested in help, and you don't think he/she needs help, then just be supportive and if they need help, they can always ask you.
 - Don't try to fix them. Leave that to the specialist. You should focus on just being the loving/supportive spouse.
- **Parents with children who have special needs:**
 - Look to your usual support groups.
 - Stay connected and talk things out with those who know how you feel.
 - Use webpages to find support and information related to helping children and parents with developmental disorders. Pictures link to webpages.



Resources: MH specialists, coaches, psychiatry, primary doctor, etc. Each picture is hyperlinked to the actual webpage. Simply click on the picture.

- American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/> - click on *psychological help center*, then *find a psychologist*.
- International Coaching Federation: <https://coachfederation.org/> - click on *find a coach*.
- American Psychiatric Association: <https://www.psychiatry.org/> - click on *Patient/Families* then click *find a psychiatrist*.



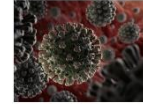
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- The American College of Physicians – COVID-19 Resources for physicians. <https://www.acponline.org/>



- The American Medical Association – resources for Physicians. <https://www.ama-assn.org/>



PUBLIC HEALTH
COVID-19 (2019 novel coronavirus) resource center for physicians
MAY 15, 2020

- The National Academy of Medicine – Well-being resources. <https://nam.edu/initiatives/clinician-resilience-and-well-being/clinician-well-being-resources-during-covid-19/>

