

# Parenting in a Pandemic

The mere announcement of a possible COVID-19 pandemic triggered fear and anxiety for many of our children. School cancellations and restrictions on every day activities that isolate families from their faith community have the potential to either reinforce these fears or to foster growth. Our parenting during this stressful time can provide an opportunity for our children to see first hand just how committed we are to their well-being and protection, as well as an opportunity to practice new ways of connecting with and caring for others. Social distancing is difficult for us, as we were created for relationship and are drawn to be in communion with others. Parenting in a pandemic requires that we find ways to calm our children's anxiety and foster healthy connections with others, while still protecting them from potential harm.

## CALMING FEARS AND ANXIETY

**God's "Got Your Back."** As Catholics, we believe that God, who is love (1 John 4:8) created all human persons for relationship with Him. We recognize that as much as we love our children, God loves them even more (Matthew 7:11). As Catholic parents, the first step in alleviating fear and anxiety in our children, is reminding them of God's love for them. We can help them imagine God's vast love by encouraging them to think about how much they love others (their parents, their friends, their grandparents, their siblings, God...) and how much they want good things for the people they love. Then remind them that the love God has for them and the good God desires for them is far greater! (And parents, remember - God loves you that much too!).

**Prayer is Powerful.** We believe that God hears our prayers (1 John 5:14) and answers our needs (John 15:7). It is helpful to remind our children that they can bring their needs to God and pray for the needs of others. It is even more helpful, to pray together. Many forms of relaxation that are used to address anxiety in clinical settings mimic forms of prayer. Practicing different styles of prayer can help equip our children with good strategies for coping with anxiety. Check out these links for prayers to practice:

[20 Ways to Teach Children to Pray - Catholic Digest](#)

[How to Handwash Catholic Style](#) - Diocese of Dallas

Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet with Bishop Hanefeldt - Diocese of Grand Island

**Focus on the Facts.** [It is important to protect our children from physical and emotional harm, setting limits that keep them from being exposed to the virus and from being exposed to false information and undue panic. There are many good resources available to parents:](#)

- [Tips and Resources for Parents](#) - ChildMind.org
- [Online Children's Book about COVID-19](#) - MindHeart.co
- [Talking to Children about COVID-19](#) - National Association of School Psychologists
- **How to Talk to Kids about Corona Virus** - Nebraska Medicine nebraskamed.com
- Something Strange Happened in My City - A Social Storybook for Children about COVID-19
  - **PDF**
  - **YouTube**

**Develop an Attitude of Gratitude.** Gratitude is a virtue. It is a component of loving relationships. It is an integral part of our faith. - And if that isn't enough, studies have shown that gratitude is good for you! The field of positive psychology examines the factors that promote mental health and bring people joy. Many of the factors that have been identified are things that we know as Catholics to be true – having faith, being part of a community, serving others, finding meaningful work...and having an attitude of gratitude. Individuals who express gratitude have been shown to be happier and healthier.

Teaching gratitude begins with modeling gratitude. When we express gratitude in our words, our prayers and our actions, our children will follow closely behind. Balancing our daily complaints and concerns by listing those things we are grateful for promotes resilience and joy in the face of suffering. Serving those who have served us or using the gifts we have been given to “pay it forward” to meet the needs of others, provides an example of gratitude in action. To make gratitude an *ordinary* part of your children's lives, set some time aside each day to discuss people, places, things, and situations that your children are grateful for. Lead your children in offering thanksgiving for these things in prayer. Identify one thing you can do together each day to express gratitude to someone else.

- **Make and play a "gratitude game"** - Teach Beside Me
- **Gratitude Sheet for Kids**
- **Make a Gratitude Jar** - Write things you are grateful for on slips of paper and fill a jar with them. Each day select three to pray for.

**You are Wonderfully Made.** God created us with purpose. He gave us brilliant and creative minds to solve problems and invent amazing things. He made our bodies to be able share, work and play. He even gave us emotions ("feelings") as important signs. They help draw us closer to one another (e.g. love, compassion, sympathy...); warn us of danger (e.g. fear, anxiety...), and can tell us when something needs to change (e.g. anger, sadness, loneliness...). Our emotions are a good and a part of being created in God's image. Sometimes our emotions don't feel so good. Sometimes our feelings get stuck or confused. Noticing how we feel and sharing our feelings with someone else (a parent, a friend, a trusted adult, with God in prayer) can help us figure out what to do. Helping our children identify their feelings and respond to them in an adaptive way is an important part of parenting... especially during uncertain times when feelings may be overwhelming or confusing. Check out the resources below or contact the Diocesan Child Protection Office for ideas about helping children identify and responding to emotions.

- **[Magination Press Story Time](#)** - Magination Press is a company that publishes therapeutic literature for children. In their "Magination Press Story Time" video series on youtube, a number of their authors read aloud books written to help children identify and respond to their emotions.

**God Connects, Sin Divides.** God loves all of His children. And guess what? We are all His children! Every single human being is a precious child of God! God created all human persons in His image. God who is love, created us for love. Every human person is hard wired for connection, with other people and with God. So how is it that violence and division can

occur? In order to love we have to be able to choose. Think about it, if someone forced you to be their friend would that really be friendship? God created us with free will so that we could freely chose to love Him and to love others. Unfortunately, since the first sin of Adam and Eve, human persons have not always chosen love. So very often, we chose to "*get*" for ourselves, rather than *give* to others. Every time we sin we create a division - we separate ourselves from others and from God. But God tells us through His angels, through His son, "Be not afraid!" Whenever we chose God, we chose connection and we heal division. Whenever we turn toward God, we turn away from sin. To help your children cope with the current headlines about racial division and violence, check out the following resources:

- [Talking to Children About Violence](#) - National Association of School Psychologists
- [Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love](#) - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [Combatting Racism: Educational Resources](#) - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [Prayer Against Racism](#) - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [Everyone Belongs Activity Sheets](#) - Loyola Press

#### MAINTAINING HEALTHY CONNECTIONS

**Invite God in.** As Catholic parents, we believe that God does not cause suffering. He does, however, walk with us when we suffer; and when we invite him to, God brings about good from our suffering. We can encourage our children to invite God to help them bring about good in many ways. We can take advantage of this additional time with our children to focus on our faith formation as a family. We can develop new traditions that help keep our focus on Sunday as the Lord's Day, even in the absence of Mass attendance. We can practice works of mercy, providing for the physical and spiritual needs of others.

- [Free Resources for Faith Formation at Home](#) - Diocese of Grand Island Faith Formation and Evangelization Office
- [Family Formation Ideas \(PDF\) - Diocese of Sioux Falls](#)
- An April calendar with daily ideas for reaching out to others, while maintaing social distance, is available as a **PDF** or as part of the Child Abuse Prevention Month events on the **Child Protection Office Materials and Resources Page**.

**Keeping Connections.** In this time of social distancing, we don't need to lose connection with our faith community. Check your parish website or facebook page for opportunities to participate in a livestream Mass. Communicate with friends and family digitally together. Bring back the "ancient art" of letter-writing (and don't forget to include a hand drawn picture for Grandma and Grandpa's refrigerator!).

- [Tips for Staying Connected](#) - Prevent Child Abuse America
- Pray the Mass - Check your parish Facebook page, [Connect to the Cathedral](#), or the [Diocese of Grand Island](#)
- [How to Pray the TV Mass from Home](#) - Diocese of Sioux Falls
- [Home altars, family rosaries, livestream Masses part of local Catholics' 'new normal'](#) - Detroit Catholic

- [Enter the "Young People with Big Faith Art Contest" - Spirit Catholic Radio](#)
- **Maintaining Healthy Connections during Child Abuse Prevention Month** - Daily activities for the month of April from the Diocese of Grand Island Child Protection Office
- **Simple Activities for Children and Adolescents** - National Children's Traumatic Stress Network

**Created for Relationship.** Human persons are social beings. We were created for relationship with God and one another. We are hard-wired to seek relationship. This is protective for human development, but also places us at risk when opportunities for healthy connections and right relationships are not readily available to us. Part of our job as parents is to help our children form and maintain right relationships with others. Relationships characterized by authentic love, not use of others. In these days of quarantine and limited outside activity we have a unique opportunity to engage children our children in discussion and encounters that provide a deliberate experience of authentic love.

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A number of curriculum components developed for use in religious education programs in our diocese are available to you as parents to provide starting points for discussion of right relationships. You can find the entire series on our [Safe Environment Program Page under Children and Youth.](#)

Or select individual topics here:

- **Communication**
- **Unconditional Love**
- **Forgiveness**
- [Boundaries](#)
- [Freedom](#)
- **Humor**
- **Respect**
- [Patience](#)
- [Attention](#) .

#### ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

**Blessed are the Peacemakers.** Because of our fallen nature, the call to love as Christ loves us is challenging - even more challenging when we are out of our normal routine and in close quarters! Most parents are not prepared to take up the challenge of holding classes at home, while working and maintaining their normal family routines. Worry about the health and safety of family members and stress due to an unplanned loss of income has many parents stressed. Children too experience stress and anxiety. In addition to fears about potential illness, their routines have changed and they may be missing friendships or favorite activities. Children and youth who are used to attending a public or private school have to adjust their study habits. For some, it is harder to admit mistakes and to hear daily constructive criticism (a necessary part of the learning process) from their parents than from a teacher. You may be

finding that family conflict and quarrels are at an all-time high in your household. If you find yourself in the midst of conflict there are resources available to help.

Try these strategies for Catholic conflict resolution from the Diocese of Grand Island Child Protection Office:

- Take a Break. If emotions are high, take some time to calm down.
  - Get everyone breathing - some deep breaths, blow bubbles, etc.
  - Say a prayer, for assistance and to refocus thoughts and put things in perspective.
  - Engage in physical activity – Call an “activity break” where everyone jumps in place, runs around the backyard, or does some sit-ups, etc.
  - If necessary, make sure everyone is safe and then excuse yourself temporarily. No one will be calm if Mom and Dad aren’t calm.
  
- Ask for the Intercession of the Holy Family.
  - There is nothing you will face as a parent that Mary and Joseph cannot understand – they lived through homelessness, threats to their family, losing their son while traveling, watching others mock and condemn him, seeing him suffer and die.
  - Check out this **Prayer to the Holy Family** from St, Teresa of Calcutta
  
- Look at every conflict as an opportunity for problem-solving.
  - Think of problem-solving as a way to know each other more.
  - Think of problem-solving as an opportunity to love each other better.
  - See “[The Wisdom of Problem Solving](#)”

Find additional assistance from organizations like the Child Mind Institute. On their [parent resource page](#) (<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>) they offer daily video tips for parents, as well as:

- [Facebook Live video chats with expert clinicians](#)
- [Remote evaluations and telemedicine](#)
- [Phone consultations for follow-up about Facebook Live events and other questions about the best way to manage kids at home](#)
- [Daily tips for parenting during the crisis, via email](#)

**If you need help finding additional resources to address family conflict, or are seeking confidential support, please call the Diocese of Grand Island Victim Assistance Ministry at: 1-800-652-2229.**

**Uniquely and Specially Created.** Everyone of us is a child of God. We are all created in His

image, yet we are all unique. As Bishop Hanefeldt says, "You are unique, special, gifted and graced. A never to be repeated wonder in all God's creation." Because of our uniqueness, a "one size fits all" approach to parenting rarely works. Each of our children is unique, in their own way bringing their own brand of gifts and challenges to family life. Check out the resources below developed to help parents address a variety of challenges that kids may face.

- Autism - [Supports for those affected by autism from Autism Nebraska](#)
- [Autism and the Coronavirus: Resources for Families](#) - Child Mind Institute
- Developmental Disability - [Find developmentally appropriate resources for coping with COVID19 from the ARC](#)
- Anxiety / OCD / Depression / ADHD - **Resources to Explain the Corona Virus**
- ADHD / Impulse Control / Anxiety / OCD - [CHAD "Guidance for Uncertain Times"](#)
- Depression / Anxiety / OCD
  - [COVID 19 Resources from the Kim Foundation](#)
  - [Anxiety and depression - How Adults Can Support Adolescent Mental Health](#)
- PTSD / Anxiety - **National Children's Traumatic Stress Network Parent Coping Guides**
- ADHD / LD / BD - [Contact or or go to PTI Nebraska online if:](#)
  - You would like information about your child's disability
  - You have a question about your child's special education program or related services
  - You would like to talk to another parent
  - **1-800-2848-8520**
- [The Child Mind Institute has clinicians available to chat online and they offer a "COVID19 parent "resource of the day."](#)
  - ["Coping During Covid 19"](#)
- Call the **Nebraska Family Helpline** for Help and Support: **1-888-866-8660**
- Or reach out to the diocesan Child Protection Office through our Victim Assistance Number at

**1-800-652-2229** for problem-solving and support or help finding additional resources.

**Keeping Kids Safe Online.** As we all turn to the internet to meet more of our needs for social interaction (and work and school and shopping...) take time to talk with your children about internet safety and online etiquette. There are a number of good resources available for parents to address general internet safety and prevention of pornography.

- [10 Ways to Keep Your Child Safe Online \(En Espanol\)](#)
- [NetSmartz](#)
- [Faith and Safety: Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith](#)
- [Protect Young Minds](#)
- [Fight the New Drug - Parent Resources](#)
- [CMG Connect: Parents](#)
  
- If your child is exposed to pornography, sexting, cyberbullying or other forms of online exploitation, contact the Diocese of Grand Island Victim Assistance Ministry at 1-800-

652-2229 for support and report directly to the **Cybertipline** - 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)