

Here we go again. Another school closure announcement due to Covid. Sigh. It's a bit early for Groundhog Day. And yet while we complain and lament the government's announcement to close schools (not to mention indoor dining, gyms, etc), this is our new reality. And as a parent, we have an important job here: helping our kids pivot and adjust to online school and the closure of many activities. Here are some suggestions to help you navigate the conversation:

1. Remind them (and yourself!) that this is temporary. We have been through this before and we have survived. And we will do it again. We can do hard things together.
2. Explain to them that the government is putting restrictions in place for the safety of all. The daily Covid numbers are too high, and while we personally may not be impacted by the number of sick people there are right now, this is not true for everyone. Consider those people who are sick enough to be in the hospital. They need our medical resources and we can help by limiting our exposure to other people. This is an opportunity to teach empathy and compassion.
3. When discussing the government and the decision makers, use a filter. Our kids do not need to hear the anger, doubt, discouragement in our voices. Kids need to feel secure, protected, loved, assured that they will be okay. If they hear us bad mouthing our elected leaders all the time, how does this help them? Save your rants (and we all have our rant moments!) for another adult, out of earshot from your kids.
4. Let them grieve. This is another loss. Expressing thoughts and feelings is essential here. What are they most disappointed about? What will they miss not being at school this month? Put down your phone and give them your full attention. Not expressing one's feelings can lead to depression and other mental health challenges. Take the time to listen.
5. After you have provided space to let your child(ren) grieve, have a conversation with them about what IS possible right now. Can you arrange outdoor time with friends? You will need to consider Covid protocols and your own comfort level regarding exposure here. Please remember that we need face to face interaction with other people to be mentally healthy. Screens have a purpose but they can't replace in person connection with other people.
6. Consider what new boundaries and house rules need to be in place this time around. What worked last year when quarantining together may not work this year. What hasn't changed is the need to work together as a family to make this happen. Work and school from home is HARD. Put on the patience and extend grace to yourself and the others in your home. Lower your expectations, people! We're in a pandemic!

Supporting our kids requires us to be healthy enough ourselves. It's the image of putting the oxygen mask on oneself before helping someone else. The remaining suggestions have to do with tending to our own wellbeing.

7. Pause and do your own mental health check in. Close to 2 years in a pandemic is HARD. Full stop. If you were to rate your mental health on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being optimal and 1 being in crisis, what number would you give yourself? What does that tell you? What step(s) do you need to take to move the number up? Please reach out to your family doctor and/or Registered Therapist for support. We're all struggling, and we can't get through this alone.
8. Consider limiting social media and the news right now. It's highly unlikely that what you are reading is fuelling your wellness. And the reality is that if the news is significant enough, you will find out. FOMO? You aren't missing out.
9. Assess your alcohol/drug consumption. While I appreciate that we all need an escape from our current reality, the truth is that substance abuse is a slippery slope and we are all a little more vulnerable right now. Back to our kids. What do we want to be modelling for them because they ARE watching.
10. Consider creating your own pandemic-isolation-lockdown "play list". Not a music playlist (although

that can be a great thing!) but a list of things that fuel and energize you personally. What IS possible right now? You will need to be open-minded and creative here as so many of the things we love to do are not an option currently (reminder that this WILL change!). Can you get out for a hike with a friend? Read a book? Play an instrument? The list will be unique to you. Where can you put that in your new (temporary) calendar to ensure that it happens? It does not need to take up a lot of time because you likely won't have a lot of time, and that's okay. But it's about putting that oxygen mask on yourself and taking ONE BREATH AT A TIME. You can do this!