

MANAGING THE CORONA-COASTER

SUMMARY OF WEBINAR

DR MICHAEL CARR-GREGG
PHD MA API - CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
PSYCHOLOGIST



THE CHALLENGE:



Navigating the reality of remote school work, lots of family time, and a ton of uncertainty about what happens next. Show empathy for how their lives are changing. For families not used to this much together time, irritability and tempers may flare. Setting and enforcing rules for calm, respectful interactions in your home promotes critical stability and mental health in your kids.

KEY MESSAGES:

Parents should be purveyors of hope.

- Set the emotional tone - taking the coronavirus seriously but convey we are not panicking
- This is all very inconvenient but our grandparents faced worse
- Politicians are doing their best to flatten the curve, while also supporting families/businesses
- If we keep doing the right thing, we may return to normality sooner

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

- Check in regularly to see how they are doing – Intervening early is important. When the situation and relationship gets to a certain level of stress, it can be much harder to decompress
- Go for a walk together – Getting outside of the house together is a good way to get the active, as well as connecting with them, or just being quiet together
- Help them keep in touch – Organise, or help them to organise, closed social media groups for those people teenagers are closest to
- Stay calm when talking about COVID-19 – Explain the dangers of COVID-19 calmly and without sensationalising it. Remind them that there are trustworthy news sources and not to spend too much time researching
- Accept that we can't control everything – Focus on the important issues and try and manage those
- Give them space – Make sure your child gets some confidential private space when they're at home, as well as time away from siblings or elderly family members
- As lock down relaxes, renegotiate young people's options for leaving the house
- Reward them for complying – Small fun treats or start a little fund of money saved to do something fun
- Have something to look forward to – Plan something big, like a party, celebration, day out or weekend away at the end of all of this

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

- Try not to over rely on them - While everyone has their jobs within the family, try not to over rely on them occupying younger siblings, for example. And if they do agree to help with them, acknowledge and reward their efforts.
- Have fun - Make time to do fun things as a family, whatever that looks like for you. Try and stick to some kind of routine - It's worth repeating: trying to maintain a normal sleep, food, exercise, school work, free time and family time routine will help things not feel so chaotic. Healthy eating and sleeping routine are also important for their overall physical and mental health.
- Increase your child's trusted circle - Meaning, make sure they still have contact with extended family or other important people in their lives. Think about who your child goes to with their issues and problems. This is someone who cares about your child's safety, who offers good practical advice, who recognises how hard it is and who can help them think about some good solutions.
- Make sure they know support lines they can use to talk to someone. (Kids Helpline - 1800 551 800). Help them develop different coping strategies - home exercise, cooking, relaxation techniques. Talk to them about the things they find relaxing and encourage them to take part in them.
- Keep connected - Catching up and staying connected with friend apps such as Houseparty, Facetime, Zoom and Online games can be great, but also make sure to talk to teenagers about their safety online. Let them know that they can talk to you if they are worried about anything online.

RESILIENCE

Kauai is the 4th largest island in the Hawaiian chain and was the setting for the 1993 Jurassic Park where terrifyingly realistic dinosaurs ran amok trying to chow down on Sam Neil and Laura Dern. More importantly, it was the setting for one of the most important studies in the field of child psychology - with findings highly relevant to parents in the coronavirus era.

In 1955, Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith began a longitudinal study of 698 children born on the island during that year. They selected that island because at the time, there were high levels of unemployment, drug and alcohol use and mental illness amongst the adults and they wanted to see what happened to children growing up in circumstances of pervasive adversity.

Following up the children for 40 years, the investigators' landmark finding, was that while two thirds of the sample crashed and burnt, one third of the cohort displayed extraordinary resilience and developed into caring, competent and confident adults, despite their environment.

The ones that made it, had access to mitigating elements known as protective factors, which helped to balance out risk factors at critical times in their development. Among these factors were a strong bond with a charismatic adult, good social skills, positive self talk and involvement in a church or community group like the YMCA.

The study reinforces the fact that kids do best when they have someone in their lives who will make them feel safe, valued and listened to, have a sense of connection, meaning, purpose and belonging and are adept at conflict resolution, anger management and problem solving. Our job is to prepare our young people for an uncertain future and Werner and Smith offer us all a much-needed template to follow, so that our kids do not end up like the brachiosaurs and dilophosaurs, of Jurassic Park.

DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES:

•The Department's [education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au) has information and advice regarding learning from home, how to talk to your child about coronavirus, bullying prevention, looking after yourself and your child's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

FUSE, <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au> - the Department's online learning hub has activities and tips that will help your family to keep healthy and active as well as links to further resources and ideas for getting through lockdown

OTHER RESOURCES:

Schooltv - <https://schooltv.me>

Building Resilience in Children 0-12 - A Practice guide for professionals - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/children/building-resilience-in-children-aged-0-12>

Smiling Mind - <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>