

Let's Redefine Parenting 'Success' Right Now

by Meghan Fitzgerald

This morning, we're about three weeks into 24/7 family togetherness and separation from nearly everything and everyone else, and, like many friends, we're taking stock. There have been some wins. We have finally learned that one of us needs to be a point person for kids at all times, figured out how to drive-by visit with friends and compiled a solid mix of storytelling podcasts to match our mix of kids. But, we're still falling shy of thriving.

There is a lot that is hard about this time for everyone, especially when you layer on worries for loved ones, for our communities, and for the world — plus the uncertainty that comes with a lack of end date. Although we can't control when all of this will end, there are things we can control — things that we can stop doing and start doing to help lessen the suffering and amplify the golden moments that pop up a few times each day in life under quarantine.

This is not a time for perfection.

This article in the Harvard Business Review has been popping up everywhere; it's been popular, I think, because it [put words to what we've all been feeling](#): Grief. This is more than hard. We are grieving for what we have lost and what we fear we will not get back. This is really extreme — it's OK to feel like a mess.

Accept the mathematical impossibility.

If we were busy before, how can we possibly keep up all we were doing already *and* gracefully take on the challenges that quarantine brings. We are each still but one person. And, no matter how we each balanced parenthood, we don't have the resources we used to draw on before — whether those are social outlets,

classes and programs, school, care for our kids or support from extended family. There just aren't enough hours in the day to nail life right now.

If you weren't your child's day-teacher before, you don't need to fill those shoes now.

When I was a teacher and a principal, I witnessed real strain in the relationship between parents and teachers — a relationship that had always seemed so well aligned in my parents' eyes. I am pleased to see parents appreciating their teachers during this time, realizing all that goes into filling a child's day with learning. Teachers have resources, training and expertise, a group setting and a team structure — how could we be expected to provide all of that? Homeschooling friends, we see you and appreciate the commitment you make and work that you do as distinct from parenting in quarantine, too.

Focus on the essentials.

As parents, we make incredible impact on our kids, and, all the way through school years, learning outcomes improve when parents are involved. You ARE your child's #1 teacher! Just focus on the lessons you were meant to teach right now. What do you want your child to learn from you? Here are three things to keep in mind:

Play is the way.

Kids are **wired to learn through play**. And, with just a little support, we parents can help our kids learn by setting up our homes and yards to promote play. Selecting and placing out materials, asking kids questions or presenting a story to get them started, and doing just a little playing with them can set them up for hours of independent and engaging play.

Life has handed you lemons. Time to make lemonade.

Life just dumped a truckload of lemons on each of our doorsteps — and in the midst of hardships, we can start fun, new rituals that add a little sweetness to this time. Enjoy family game night. Go for a walk every evening. Start your day with a little family yoga or read aloud and snuggle. Schedule a snack picnic mid day each day

just to make sure you have the chance to touch in. Savor these sweet moments, no matter how off-the-rails the remainder of the day feels — these moments are real, and each one of them should be worth 10X any lackluster moment.

The sweeter the lemonade we make, the better we do at teaching our kids to adapt to whatever life hands them. Out of all the things we're struggling to teach them now, this might be the one home-school lesson they'll benefit from the most.

Put your own oxygen mask on first — for real.

No matter how we distance our kids from the news of the day or the struggles of this time, kids cue off of our emotions. We all need help **managing our anxiety** during such an uncertain and stressful time. Make sure you are fed, get fresh air, move your body, sleep, etc. It's all too easy to focus so much on what our kids need or to spend all of our time spinning many different plates that we forget to take care of us. When you plan out each day, make a checklist for yourself that matches the checklist for your kids.

Focus on Community

One of the hardest things about this time is the feeling of isolation. That not only cuts us off from sources of help and support, but too much time to think about our own situation can start to amplify our worries.

Stay informed but balance the gloom and doom with online community outlets that are supportive and sustaining. Use FaceTime, GoogleHangouts and Zoom to help connect with family and friends. Spend time in places in which you can vent, laugh, and get a little extra wind in your sails.

Wisdom

You and only you know what will work for you. There is so much advice, curriculum and external wisdom flooding around right now. Trust your gut. Turn towards the resources that feel right and be ready to switch it up if something that works for someone else isn't working for you. No matter what, remember you are doing the best you each can and, when all else fails, hug kids long and often.