

How to Be There for Your Family During the Coronavirus Crisis

Because your family needs your best self In the days and weeks ahead.

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The [coronavirus pandemic](#) has forced many of us into [crisis](#) mode. Millions of parents are asking: How can I be there for my family when I'm trying to balance everything that's going on? How can I keep my emotions in check and not make matters worse? How do I keep it all together?

Psychologist [Dr. Susan Mecca](#) has been helping people in crisis — and answering these very questions — for more than 35 years. The author of *[The Gift of Crisis: Finding Your Best Self in the Worst of Times](#)*, Dr. Mecca has developed a framework of actionable steps that everyone can use during the COVID-19 crisis to regain control and present their best selves to their families. Using the acronym C.R.I.S.I.S., she breaks it down into the following steps:

1. **C**entering
2. **R**esources
3. **I**ntentions
4. **S**trategy
5. **I**ntuition
6. **S**elf-Care

“Everyone during crisis needs to be mindful of their [moods](#) and model our ability to deal with [uncertainty](#),” she says. “It’s about [caring for yourself](#), setting proper intentions, and surrounding yourself with people who can give helpful advice and modeling for your kids. It’s giving yourself the tools to say ‘We are in this and we can get through this.’” Here, according to Dr. Mecca, is how parents can do just that.

1. What is your biggest fear related to the coronavirus pandemic?

Given mortality rates, I'm scared my parents will die.

Given what we don't know, I'm scared my kids will get sick.

Given the economic situation, I'm scared of the financial damage.

Given the news, I'm scared I'll continue to be cooped up with family.

Get Centered

It's difficult to tend to others when you're struggling with your own thoughts and fears; you can't be your best, most useful self. If you're feeling panicky, stressed, or [anxious](#), take a few minutes and do what you need to do to get centered. Maybe that's putting your child in the crib for five minutes while you go into the bathroom, shut the door, and breathe slowly and deeply or whatever it is to get yourself back in your body. Maybe it's telling your 10-year-old that we're going to take a time-out and go into our respective rooms and do our own things for a half hour. "Whatever it is, getting centered and taking time every day to do that makes a huge difference," says Dr. Mecca.

Manage Your Resources

Dr. Mecca suggests breaking resource-management into two categories: [managing the information you take in](#) and identifying a community of support you can turn to — and she emphasizes that both are equally important.

We are overwhelmed by updates and data and political grandstanding. To ensure our mental health is in check, we need to be better — and more aggressive — curators. Ask yourself: What information is helpful and what information makes you feel more panicked?

"Figure out what will help you be your best self during this, and limit yourself to that data," says Dr. Mecca. How can we do this? Know thyself. "If you're someone who can look at numerous news stories and data and put it into an appropriate place and not let it impact your mood, then you don't need to limit it," says Dr. Mecca. "If, on the other hand, you find yourself, after reading it, more stressed out, more panicky, more irritable, more whatever — which I'm guessing is the large majority — then you need to limit it."

Next in line is your community of support. Dr. Mecca suggests thinking of yourself as the head of a company and the company as your family. Who should be on the board of directors and helping you to make decisions? Consider: Who do you want to listen to right now? Which of your friends or colleagues can you call on for advice or encouragement? Ask those questions and choose three to five people you know you can rely on. Your bother-in-law who's a prepper? Probably not on the list. Friends who are in healthcare and can provide you good data, or simply friends or family who are wise and have great perspective? Use them. Call them. Rely on them when things are overwhelming or problems arise. It takes a village. But make sure the villagers are going to be helpful.

Set Your Intentions

According to Dr. Mecca, the most important thing you can do during any crisis is to stop and say to yourself: *Who do I want to be during this and how do I want to act?* Creating this intention, she says, is crucial to keeping yourself in check. Are there going to be times when you want to scream instead of being patient, or blow up when you want to be calm and measured? Absolutely. We're all human. But if you make this intention and share it with a spouse or someone else from your board of directors, it can help you get back on track. "Planes don't fly in a straight line. They're always changing course," says Dr. Mecca. "So as a parent you're always going to be readjusting. But if you don't know your course, you don't know what you're readjusting to." This is critical for parents in particular because how dads and moms show up impacts how our kids show up.

Equally as important is to set intentions as a family. "Think about how can you get across that we as a family can do this? Well, we can think about our community. We can think about our friends. We can think about our

grandparents,” says Dr. Mecca. “One of the big things you learn in adulthood is that you have responsibility for your mood and you can choose how you’re going to show up regardless of how everyone else shows up.”

The key message in all of this that parents need to deliver is: I know it’s scary outside but we’re fine and doing what we can to help. It could be “Oh, well we’re contributing to this charity or offering this service and doing all of these things because we want to be helpers during this,” says Dr. Mecca. “Set the intention to show your family what you can have control over.”

Be Strategic

We all have strengths and weaknesses, both of which will be emphasized during a crisis. As such, it’s important, per Dr. Mecca, to dig deep and ask yourself the following:

- *What are my strengths and weaknesses?*
- *What am I really good at during a crisis and how do I leverage that?*
- *What am I not good at?*
- *Is there somebody I can get to help me with this? My partner? A member of my “board of directors”?*

This self-interrogation puts everything into perspective and allows you to rely on the skills that can really assist your family during tough times. On that note, however, it’s equally important to ask yourself: *What strength am I likely to overuse?* If you’re, say, good at organizing, you might have a tendency to go a bit OCD during heightened times. Understanding these qualities and keeping yourself in check will be better for everyone.

Be Intuitive

Listen to your own wisdom. “This doesn’t mean to disregard everything that people say or the data that is available,” says Dr. Mecca. “But there are times when you, as a parent, will know deep down that your child needs X even though all the advice says that this kid needs Y.” Performing the occasional gut check helps you to stay centered and remain on target.

Practice Self-Care

“If you don’t take care of yourself as a parent during this crisis, you can’t take care of your kid,” says Dr. Mecca, echoing the sentiment of so many professionals. “You absolutely have to take care of the basics. And by you doing it, you can make sure your kids are doing it.” Meditate for five minutes. Do some deep breathing exercises. Eat good food. Get proper sleep.

Everyone should be asking themselves: What actually does make me feel better? Keep track. If you hop on social media to chat with friends for a few minutes but then find yourself feeling worse because of all the social media mind-fuckery, then figure out an alternative. Set up Zoom Meetings or Google Hangouts with friends instead. Grab a beer with a buddy over FaceTime. “The goal is understanding what you need to do to be the best parent and person you can be right now,” she says.