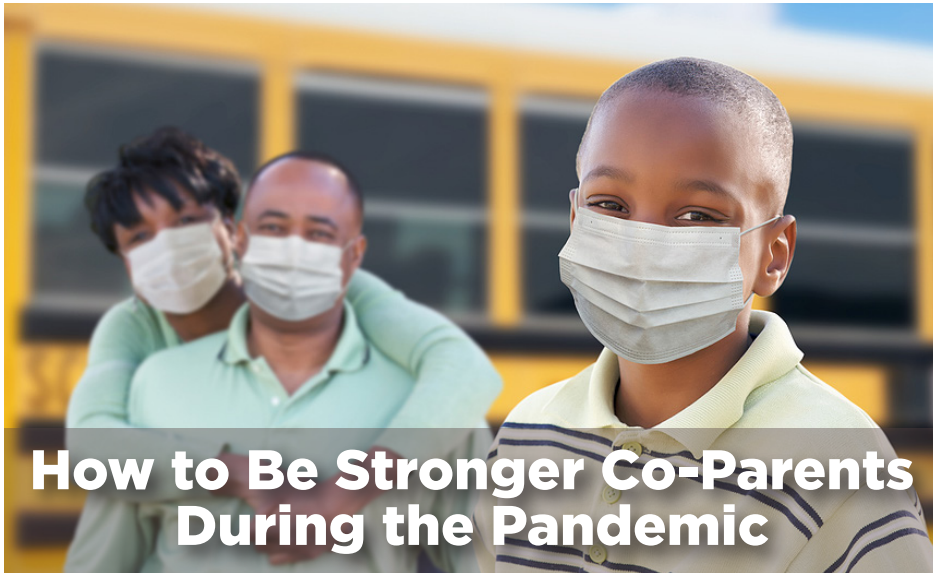


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EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER **IMPACT**

October-December 2020



How to Be Stronger Co-Parents During the Pandemic

Parents are under a lot of pressure, but good communication can support your family's well-being.

The coronavirus pandemic has been tremendously stressful, especially for parents. According to the recent American Psychological Association Stress in the Time of COVID-19 survey, parents feel much greater strain than adults who don't have children.

Why? More than seven out of 10 parents are experiencing significant concern about themselves or a family member getting coronavirus, adjusting to new or disrupted routines, and managing distance learning for their kids. The majority of parents report that their kids are acting out more since the start of the pandemic, and they're worried that it will do long-term harm to children's social development. What's more, the coronavirus is leading to disproportionately more stress, pressure, and loss for people of color.

Many of us are struggling to juggle these new circumstances with our co-parents, that is, our current or former partners or spouses, extended family members, or friends with whom we share child care responsibilities. With many families spending all day and every day at home together, co-parents are feeling constrained and conflicts are simmering. How can co-parents work as partners while in the crucible of the pandemic?

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ANTI-RACISM RESOURCE CENTER

Claremont EAP stands solidly against racial injustice.

CLAREMONT EAP'S

COVID-19 RESOURCE CENTER

Easy access to global news and EAP resources

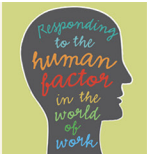
Stay Positive

This Claremont EAP website provides tips and tools to enhance resilience.

Visit the Positivity Center

Claremont EAP distributes this newsletter to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and family matters.

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University of California, Berkeley, psychology professors

Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip Cowan have been studying family relationships and their effects on children's development since 1975, including what kinds of programs and practices help strengthen families during significant life transitions. Among the key lessons they learned from studying hundreds of families is that positive co-parenting relationships not only improve the entire family system, but are critical for children's flourishing.

These five tips were originally shared by the Cowans on ParentLab. They can help co-parents find ways to bolster their relationship and overcome conflict during this stressful time.

1 List and discuss what's important to you

To set the stage for discussing a conflict or disagreement, begin by taking five minutes to reflect in solitude on your own priorities right now. What has been occupying your mind and heart in terms of your family? These concerns could include, but are not limited to, your family's health, your kids' progress, and the quality of your relationships with your co-parent or kids. List as many or as few of these priorities as are noteworthy to you, and then rank them in order of importance.

Make time to share your lists with each other and talk about what you notice. How do your lists compare? Approach this activity with the intention of being open to learning something new about yourself and your co-parent.

Choose one concern that you think would be important for you to discuss together. This could be how to prioritize who does what in the family, like who is taking on the morning routines with your young children, or what your perspectives are on safe and unsafe activities for your older children, like riding their skateboards in the neighborhood.

2 Reflect on the goodness in each other

When we're in the middle of a conflict, we tend to see everything that's wrong with our co-parent. But a few short reflections can help put us in a different mindset.

The American Psychological Association cautions that the negative mental health effects of the pandemic are and will be severe and pervasive. If the pandemic is poised to be the most significant collective stressor of many people's lives, is it possible that your co-parent is experiencing an intense amount of pressure right now and doing the best they can under these extreme circumstances? Is that true for you, too?

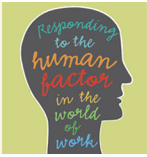
Another way to soften toward your co-parent when you're feeling annoyed is to practice exploring gratitude for each other. Try to call to mind what you have valued about one another during times when you weren't as upset. Have there been moments you can remember when you were sources of support to each other?

3 Have a collaborative conversation

Here's an idea from the late Dan Wile, a nationally known couples therapist who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area. When discussing your concern, start the conversation with emotional vulnerability. Rather than attacking your co-parent—"You never help the kids with their Zoom class meetings"—tell them how you're feeling about your concerns. For example, you might say, "I'm feeling vulnerable when it comes to my job because I've been trying to keep the kids engaged online with their teachers, instead of finishing the project that my coworkers are counting on me to complete. Can we talk about this?"

Rather than giving a long monologue or rant, keep your statements short so that you can both take turns listening to one another. Give each other

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feedback so that you can be sure you're processing what your partner is saying. For example, you can tell your co-parent, "I hear you saying that you're overwhelmed because there's not enough time to help the kids stay on top of school and to do your work."

Be curious about your co-parent's vantage point and ask them questions. You can say, "Tell me more," so that you make sure you understand what is underlying their concerns. Appreciating their full perspective can help you collaboratively problem-solve.

4 Tell your kids about the resolution

When co-parents have conflict, children are bound to notice, and it can spill over to them, leading to fear, worry, and insecurity. In turn, this can impact their day-to-day functioning: Some may have trouble staying focused on schoolwork or getting along with siblings.

Our kids stand to benefit from seeing us model how we can assertively problem-solve together, rather than remaining in intransigent patterns of attacking or stonewalling. This is good for their well-being, as well as their own relationship skills.

In front of your kids, this might mean acknowledging you were upset with one another and explaining how you worked it out, which provides children with reassurance. You can describe how you took the time to think about what, exactly, was the problem and how you named your feelings about it. Explain why this is an important step in helping someone else know your perspective before you hear from them, and how you can later think together about possible solutions. Kids can gain from hearing about alternatives you brainstormed and how you persisted to arrive at an agreement.

5 Nurture yourself and others

Persistent stress is depleting, and finding simple ways to restore ourselves from time to time is essential—and will help us resolve conflicts better or avoid them altogether.

We are constantly trying to make sure our children get enough healthy food, sleep, and exercise, and we need to do the same for ourselves. The coronavirus pandemic is proving to be a long journey, and we have to marshal all the resources available to us in order to continue being caregivers to our children and partners to our co-parents.

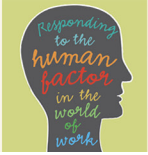
In a time of physical distancing, we can take comfort in solitary routines like calming showers or drinking tea. But we can also be restored by small acts of taking care of others, such as picking up groceries for immunocompromised neighbors or donating canned goods to food banks. For co-parents who are currently partners, we can nurture our relationship by simply remembering to play together—to dance in the family room or watch a comedy on Netflix. These light moments are deposits in our positivity reservoir, to draw on when the going gets tough again.

There's no doubt that many families need support now more than ever. Despite all these challenges, more than four out of five parents are grateful for being able to spend extra time with their children during the coronavirus pandemic. Making small changes to strengthen your co-parenting relationships can be a lifeline for your family, and a source of resilience and well-being for your children during these unprecedented times.

This article is adapted from the Cowan's talk recorded in a ParentLab video "Parents Under Quarantine: Finding Collaboration in Conflict."

By Phil Cowan, Carolyn P. Cowan, Maryam Abdullah | September 8, 2020

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Do This in the Afternoon for a Better Workday

This small habit can help you feel like you're making progress at work.

Do you feel content with what you've accomplished at the end of your workday—or do you always focus on what there is yet to do?

What we focus on shapes our mental narrative, which affects how we feel about work. Ruminating on our lack of progress can keep us in a rut, feeling like we're lagging behind. But according to research, we can shift this narrative by reflecting on what we have accomplished each day—and feel good about these small “wins.”

In one study, researchers Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer asked 238 employees from different types of companies—management, inventing, technology, and more—to write daily journal entries about their workday and answer questions about their mood and motivation. Over the course of about four months, the researchers collected almost 12,000 entries.

They found that when people journaled about making progress that workday, they were more likely to feel happier, be intrinsically motivated, and perceive obstacles as a challenge rather than a threat—setting them up for further progress. In fact, of the different factors the researchers examined—from getting help from a colleague to receiving words of encouragement—making meaningful progress was the most important predictor of a good workday.

What counts as progress? Big wins, like completing a year-long report or receiving a bonus, can make us feel great. However, according to Amabile and Kramer, “Even ordinary, incremental progress can increase people's engagement in the work and their happiness during the workday.” This could be as simple as clearing your inbox or having an important conversation with a colleague. Whatever it is, if it is a meaningful accomplishment to you, it is a win to celebrate.

In another study, researcher Dan Ariely and his colleagues asked participants to build LEGO figures at a declining pay rate until they chose to stop, starting at \$2 per LEGO. In one group, each LEGO figure they made was added to a collection on the experimenter's desk, so that they could see the progress they were making. In the second group, after the LEGO figure was put together, the experimenter would break it down, then give participants the option to recreate it again. Despite both groups being paid the same, the first group was motivated to build significantly more LEGOs than the second.

According to Ariely, seeing progress gives our tasks some purpose. Purpose can come from contributing to something we personally care about, or just some specific objective that we are working toward. Either way, we're more motivated when it's clear how our work is making a difference.

How to recognize small wins

The way an organization is structured and run plays a role in how much progress employees can see, including how managers support and motivate them. Managers should be sure to express to employees how valuable their work is, recognize progress, and avoid canceling projects as much as possible.

We can also take steps to cultivate motivation on our own, by focusing on small wins from the workday. Journaling—like the people in Amabile and Kramer's study did—is one exercise that can help to make meaning and progress more salient. At the end of each workday, consider a success that stood out and how it made you feel.

In the GGSC's online Foundations of Happiness at Work course, we had learners try this out by writing about wins from their workday. Michel, a learner working in hospitality in Madrid,



Spain, shared the joy of coming up with a name for a new product. “After submitting the idea to the team, there was a large consensus that this would be the name. I felt very happy,” he said. “It is a small thing that did not require big efforts but the satisfaction is very high. That made my day.”

When you accomplish something, it might be tempting to move straight on to the next task. But pausing to recognize your own effort and achievement is meaningful.

It's especially important if you have a tendency to focus on your mistakes or failures. “I find that if I spend too much time dwelling on the losses, especially in a sales role, it gets me down and negatively impacts my outlook. I can become discouraged and pessimistic,” shares Matt from northern California. “If, instead, I can list and focus on the small wins, this feels empowering to me.”

Work life is full of obstacles, especially now during the pandemic. For those who are still employed, many of us have had to adapt and change the way we work in this new environment. Acknowledging each challenge overcome and each task completed as a win helps us to build a sense of meaning and motivation.

By Jessica Lindsey | September 2, 2020

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