I like to envision the whole world as a jigsaw puzzle...

If you look at the whole picture, it is overwhelming and terrifying, but if you work on your little part of the jigsaw and know that people all over the world are working on their little bits, that’s what will give you hope.

Jane Goodall
"At many times throughout their lives, children will feel the world has turned topsy-turvy. It’s not the ever-present smile that will help them feel secure. It’s knowing that love can hold many feelings, including sadness, and that they can count on the people they love to be with them until the world turns right side up again."

- Fred Rogers
Steps to Help Protect Against Coronavirus COVID-19
To Help Prevent the Spread of Respiratory Illnesses, Use Healthy Practices:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the time it would take you to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice) or, if soap is not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw it in the trash. If a tissue isn’t available, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Practice healthy habits: get sleep, eat nutritious food, drink fluids, be physically active and manage stress.
- Influenza and pneumococcal disease are the leading causes of vaccine-preventable respiratory illness in the U.S., so protect yourself with an annual flu vaccine and if eligible, the pneumonia vaccine.

cdc.gov/covid19
1. Make children feel safe.
We are battling two enemies here: One is Covid-19; the other is the anxiety about Covid-19. Kids may be all but immune from this new virus, but they are susceptible to the anxiety surrounding it. Watch your words and tone. Stay calm. Reassure children that this is temporary and that they, and their caregivers, are going to be just fine.

2. Give them facts, and let them lead the discussion.
Children need simple, honest answers. Avoid hushing your talk when they walk into a room, and never lie. You might say: “The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are very, very tiny, and when they get inside your body, they can make you sick. The germs get in your body through your nose, mouth or eyes. When someone coughs and touches a doorknob, and then you touch the doorknob, those germs might get into your body. It’s helpful to wash our hands a lot and try to stay away from big crowds.” A rule of thumb? Let them lead the discussion. “Too much information can create anxiety,” says Linda Hatfield, a parent-education coach and one of my co-authors on ParentShift: Ten Universal Truths That Will Change the Way You Raise Your Child. “Answer only what they ask. Also, avoid language that blames race, animals or culture for the spread of the virus.” If you’re looking for specific words to use, BrainPOP put out a great little video for young children. Check it out.

3. Give them power — and responsibility.
Kids do better when they have power; it’s one of their emotional needs. And this is a great time to give it to them. After all, children are proving to be kind of like superheroes in this; their bodies seem to have an extraordinary ability to fight off the coronavirus in ways that many other bodies cannot. But with great power comes great responsibility, right? Kids can help their neighbors and loved ones stay safe and healthy if they frequently wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice. Remind them to wipe down their devices often, as well, and to cough or
sneeze into their elbows or a tissue. You might tell them that hand-washing is like kryptonite to the coronavirus, and hand-sanitizer is a perfectly good stand-in when they can’t find soap and water.

4. **Let them know what to expect.**
The rough part here is we don’t know exactly what to expect in the weeks and months ahead. But we do know some things. We know, for instance, we’re going to be seeing a lot less of the people in our lives. We know that we’re going to have to find creative ways to pass the time at home. We know that we aren’t going to have access to all the foods we like, and that we’ll have to work harder to keep ourselves, and our homes, clean. And we know that Covid-19 can resemble a typical cold. While there is a potential to get very sick and even die, many people — especially children — have reported only mild symptoms — fever, runny nose and cough.

5. **Empathy, empathy, empathy.**
So much good can be done when we allow our kids to express the full range of their emotions, and when we receive those feelings with empathy. If their fears and frustrations are minimized or dismissed, Hatfield says, they likely will show up in other ways — fighting with siblings, throwing tantrums or being generally uncooperative. For small children with big emotions, she says, get on their level and say something affirming like, “I imagine you are worried about getting sick. I wonder if you are frightened about all the things that are suddenly changing.” For kids feeling the pinch of isolation, you could say, “It’s so frustrating to not compete in your dance team program. You had looked forward to that for months!” You don’t have to agree with a child’s thoughts or feelings to acknowledge them without judgment or minimizing.

6. **Keep your child’s developmental stage and temperament in mind.**
Let’s be honest: Your explorative, tactile kid won’t suddenly start keeping his “hands to home” just because the stakes are higher. Your perpetually forgetful preschooler won’t suddenly memorize the steps to correct hand-washing just because you’ve told her in “your serious voice” how to do it. Depending on their ages, stages and temperaments, some children will require more reassurance or more time to transition than others. The situation is unique,
and so is your child. Keep your expectations in check. If things go sideways in unexpected ways, it might be a good time to say “isn’t that interesting?” and let it go.

7. **Try to maintain a normal routine.**
   It’s not easy to “stick to routine” when school closures have upended our routines massively. But try to establish a new routine, as best you can. As we all know, some kids are frightened and overwhelmed by big changes in their environments. For these little ones, allow plenty of time for them to adapt to the new system. Hatfield suggests making a calendar, perhaps with pictures, that helps kids envision how things will go.

8. **Model the behavior you want to see.**
   Children look to us for guidance and support, especially in trying times. “We are their North Star on how to respond,” Hatfield says. “Model a positive confidence about the topic, and stay grounded.” That goes for issues like hygiene and social isolation, too. You can’t expect a 6-year-old to wash her hands or a 10-year-old to isolate from his friends if their parents aren’t willing to do the same.

9. **Consider adjusting the screen time limits.**
   With so many of us working from home, and unable to count on our usual childcare, getting by is a good thing; this isn’t the time to beat ourselves up. If you need to temporarily adjust your screen-time limits, do it. Just be smart about it; if you loosen all the limits around addictive games or programs, those things will be much harder to manage after things calm down, Hatfield says. “So try to be specific about how much time is allowed and with whom they can communicate.” Get ideas online about other things to do with kids that are not screen-related, and remember that they need to run and play. Without school recess, you may want to implement “yard time” to get them moving. Also, if possible, encourage the use of social apps, such as Skype or Facetime, where your kids can interact with others. Social connection is important, especially at a time of social distancing. Virtual playdates may help keep cooped-up kids feeling balanced and sane.
10. **Take care of yourself.**

   These are anxiety-producing times on a number of levels; we parents are shouldering a lot. Be sure to take care of yourself. Turn off the news; too much discouraging news is bad for our health — and our kids’ health. Run a bath; light candles; take a walk or a long afternoon nap; meditate. Look for sensory experiences — pet the dog or cat, flip through a family vacation album, put on some music or bake cookies. Do things that make you feel good and centered. Do whatever you can to calm your own nerves so that you have the bandwidth to handle your children’s difficult questions and challenging behavior.

   The days ahead will be different for us all, and difficult for some of us. But this need not be a bad time for your family.

   “Take this opportunity to reflect and make some positive changes to your new normal,” Hatfield suggests. “Slow down and play games, read books, snuggle and cuddle, cook together, authentically connect and play together.”

   You and your child will get through this — and, if you’re lucky, you may even be a little better for it in the end.