During current challenges of the COVID virus with digital learning, teleworking and social isolation, the lives of children and families are dramatically different! Here are some tips to help your family thrive during challenging times:

* Adopt a positive attitude about change as an opportunity for growth and learning. This time of isolation is an opportunity for family members to enjoy quality time together and grow closer.
* Develop a schedule and routine for your family. Set regular bed and waking times, meals, physical activity, chores and breaks.
  + While there is no hard and fast rule, the general guide is toddlers need around 12 hours of sleep a night; children aged 3 – 6 years old need 10-12 hours; 7-12 year old children need 10-11 hours; and teenagers need around eight to nine hours.
  + Children and teens need an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Walking or running, riding bikes, dancing, soccer or kickball are healthy choices that are fun!
  + Allow some time for unstructured, creative play. It takes children 30 minutes of “being bored” to begin to be creative.
  + Involve all children in Art and Music which stimulates brain development and promotes well-being. <https://www.brainfacts.org/neuroscience-in-society/the-arts-and-the-brain/2017/art-music-and-the-brain-how-the-arts-influence-us-021617> .
  + Determine daily chores that are developmentally age appropriate. Teach children life skills by assisting with laundry, cooking, doing yardwork and maintaining household order. (A good rule of thumb is do not do for a child what he/she can do for themselves.)
  + Involve children in a daily devotion, reading the Bible and prayer. Memorize Bible verses together.
  + Set healthy boundaries for yourself, your children and family.
* Model positive attitudes, behavior and life choices. The most impactful teacher for a child is his/her parents! Your child is constantly watching and learning from you!
* Limit screen time to daily digital learning. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than 2 hours a day for children and teenagers. It is advisable to not allow children or teenagers to have devices in their bedrooms, especially at night. <https://screenstrong.com/how-much-screen-time-is-okay-during-the-quarantine/?inf_contact_key=1bd097240be4ec66ae98a933920d3e14>
* Turn off the news! Keep children truthfully informed through parental interpretation and wisdom.
* Have FUN! Play board games and outdoor games. Invite each child to select and lead an activity for the family to do together!
* Have children read (a real book, if possible, not just reading on a device) for pleasure and write daily. One idea is to have children write a daily gratitude journal or keep a journal of what they are learning or doing.
* Encourage random acts of kindness. For example, have children draw and send a drawing or painting to an elderly relative or neighbor. Have teenagers write a letter to a friend.
* Nurture the relationship with your spouse. Talk about your challenges and joys. Really listen to each other. Celebrate your differences and figure out how to work together. Deal appropriately with conflict. Be creative about quality time together without kids.
* Realize that each child is unique and will respond to stress differently. Spend time one-on-one with each child every day to listen, encourage and help them develop strategies to deal with stress.
* Connect with family and friends through phone calls, emails, letters, social media or Zoom. This is especially important when feeling discouraged, frustrated, isolated or disconnected.
* Know when to ask for help! If you, your spouse, child or teenager is isolating from the family, expressing strong emotions, or threatening self-harm, seek professional help.

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