

# Safe and Happy Children and Teens During the COVID-19 National Emergency

Ideas for families from a longtime Family to Family Advocate

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Okay, so schools are closed and kids are home. This was sure sudden and unexpected. **For families that have a child that has additional emotional or behavioral needs**, this may be an **extra hard time**. We have never done this before! ***Be Flexible. Be Adaptable.***

Families are trying to keep their children and teens **safe, healthy, and occupied**. Let's address first the **occupied** part. Here are some **TIPS** and then some **RESOURCES**.

## Tips

### Tip #1: Set Goals That Keep Kids Safe and Happy

Physical health and mental health are connected, so being calm and happy supports good health all around.

- Now is the time to focus on what your child likes to do. Things that make them feel successful. It's not the time to frustrate them with things they struggle to do. That goes for everyone!
- **Use and share your gifts**, including reaching out to others. **We feel better when we can help someone else.**
- Focus on the **moment** and make moments **fit** who you all are.
- Schedule **me time** for everyone.
- Everyone is coping with a new reality--**it's okay to be upset or need down time.**
- **Make expectations realistic, flexible, and adaptable.** This is a hard adjustment for everybody.

### Tip #2: Try Student-Centered Learning for School Tasks

**Don't** worry about learning multiplication tables or writing book reports--unless a child likes doing that!

- Student-centered learning gives children the **luxury of exploring and growing in areas they enjoy** for as long or as briefly as they like.
- What rocks your child's world? Dinosaurs, Legos, sports, reading, nature, fashion. Let them do a deep dive into their favorite stuff.
- Here's a [3 ½ minute video on Student Centered Learning](#). And by the way, it's also called 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. Pretty cool!
- As families and schools work together during the pandemic, we will be learning **what really works** for us all.



### Tip #3: Create a Wellness Plan for Everyone

You can make a poster, or a diary or just talk about it every day.

- Ask what's something you can do today that would make your **happy**?
- **Share Happy Goals** together and help each other do them.
- Ask **what makes you feel well**. What is wellness for you- sleeping easily, getting exercise, eating food that gives you energy.
- All these things can be called your **Personal Medicine**. Pat Deegan created this idea after her own journey to wellness. Pat was diagnosed with serious mental illness as a teen. Pat explains Personal Medicine [on this 3.5-minute video](#).
- **Share your wellness plans with your child's therapist. Invite them to help you and your child work on these goals.**

## Resources

These resources are especially for families of children and teens with additional behavioral health needs.

### Communication Help (phone & internet)

Therapy and doctor's visits are being offered by phone and video calls. There are resources to get you free internet, WIFI, or phone minutes. Ask:

- Your local internet providers what they are offering families.
- Your school what they are offering students.
- Your child's therapist or doctor if they know of communication help.

### Services Offering Free Access

Many businesses continue to offer free WIFI, even if you don't go inside, you can get online from your car. Many carriers offer low-cost Wi-Fi or expanded services. Contact service providers to find out.

### Family to Family Advocacy

There are many family organizations in Pennsylvania. These groups provide support and information to families of children and youth with additional behavioral health needs. Their staff is families with experience with getting services for their own children. They are trained to help other families. It's really helpful to talk with someone who has "walked in your shoes." Here's the list:

### Parent Education and Advocacy and Leadership (PEAL) (Statewide)

The [PEAL Center](#) helps families and individuals with disabilities and special health care needs, including help with educational rights.

412-281-4404 (Pittsburgh)

215-567-6143 (Philadelphia)

866-950-1040 Toll-Free

[info@pealcenter.org](mailto:info@pealcenter.org)



### **PA Parent and Family Alliance (Statewide)**

[PPFA](#) supports parents and families of children and young adults with social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges.

Email: [contact@pafamilyalliance.org](mailto:contact@pafamilyalliance.org)

Phone: 412-438-6129

- [Request support](#) - connect to family peer to peer support including phone support
- [Home Together Resources](#) (COVID-19 Pandemic Resources for Families)

### **PA Families Inc. (PFI)**

PFI provides support to families raising children and youth with emotional, behavioral, and special needs

<https://pafamiliesinc.org/>

800-947-4941

### **Allegheny Family Network (AFN) – (Allegheny County)**

Allegheny Family Network provides opportunities for families to support each other

[www.alleghenyfamilynetwork.org](http://www.alleghenyfamilynetwork.org)

Phone: AFN Chatline -888-273-2361

### **Chester County**

LIFE offers family peer to peer support for families of children and youth up to age 25.

<https://www.accessservices.org/services/chesco-life-program/>

Phone: 215.429.8383

Email [chescolife@accessservices.org](mailto:chescolife@accessservices.org)

