

10 commandments through the lockdown



Yesterday All India Radio reached out to me to record some tips for parents through this lock down because of increased anxiety levels and a lack of awareness on what to do. I suggested instead two segments to be recorded (which we did over the phone - once edited and aired pan India I will be able to share the audio file). I was appalled at how many parents were reaching out for academic worksheets and activities when this is a priceless opportunity to develop relationships that are usually neglected during the school year.

These are the ten commandments ? that were recorded:

1. Rest - make sure that children have sufficient rest. Anxious times require a rested brain. That is the time the glial cells in the brain help reduce stress and clear any stress hormones or toxins from the brain. It's also essential not to allow for excessive viewing of stress provoking visual content including movies and cartoons designed with violence.

2. Nutrition - ensure that children have healthy meals that are balanced. This is also the time to model and help children learn not to waste and also to develop the habit of eating things they do

not normally eat on school days because many rely on poorly balanced quick meals or school lunches.

3. Exercise - staying active playing (while maintaining the social distancing rules) goes a long way. If you do not have access to outdoor spaces then dancing and indoor exercises are also very useful.

Without balancing the physiological needs trying to move ahead into any other goal including learning and emotional regulation will be a failure.

4. Model don't Control - parents feel that the use of control or high handed discipline will ensure compliance. However, this is likely to bring in more rebellion and break down of communication. If you wish to change behaviours this is the time to model and include your child in as many activities. This is crucial in making or breaking your relationship. Control never works as much as a good and consistent model.

5. Academics - this is not the time to pressure the child with academics. Work instead on practical application of what they learn in school. It can start with basic science in the kitchen or while washing clothes can be basic budgeting with planning and problem solving. In addition, this is a good time to also develop critical thinking through discussion. Work on the do it yourself projects you probably never made time for earlier. Life offers experiences and not spelling tests so set your goals right.

6. Reduce Screen Time - though screen time is probably what most of you rely on to zone out and not think, it will be the single most destructive activity during this lockdown especially if it involves meaningless and passive unidirectional viewing of entertainment shows and cartoons. Model this too. Be firm when you restrict screen time. It is toxic for the nervous system and your role is crucial in changing these patterns.

7. Allow for Boredom - your role is to allow your child to get bored. Many of you may have relied in

the past on over scheduling your child's day with classes meant to make them more intelligent and all of that but remember true thinking happens when my own brain feels the need to learn. For this boredom is required. The boredom will lead to self driven play, steered by the nervous system and will lead to acquisition of new skills. (This is why that chair activity video from one of my speeches became viral). When children learn they learn more through purposeless activity where they are fully involved than through clearly defined and explicitly instructed activities. So stop rushing to entertain your child. Allow them to explore and find ways to play, think and acquire skills.

8. Delegate and allow for participation - in all household chores allow your child to play a major role everyday. This is a great time to make them aware of their roles in making the home a better place to live in. Don't be critical when they are unable to do something. Allow for learning the routines by making mistakes too.

9. Hobbies - introduce children to games you played as a child. This is a great time to let them know what gadget free games are. Introduce them to new hobbies by sharing your own childhood experiences with philately or reading. Read to your child, collect with your child. Your role in the hobby and not your instructions ensure that the hobby is meaningful.

10. Build the relationship - know that children are also likely to experience a lot of anxiety because of the news cycles churning out anxiety provoking news repeatedly. When they speak, listen. Let them know that you are also unsure but that together you can focus on the present and on staying indoors and staying safe. Support your child when they struggle with tasks. Laugh, play, bond. There is nothing more precious than relationships that are built on the simplicity of being human and capable of being real. This kind of bonding is free from the need to buy things, entertain, rush to fix things or do more to fit in. This kind of relationship is built on love and trust.

Do share if this resonates with you. (The second segment on mental wellness in children during a lockdown and our role as parents is also on my wall. Please do take time to read, practice and share it too)