

Keeping our Kids Occupied in our Family Bubble

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This is new for all of us, and scary

It's easy to shift our focus onto the kids, when really, this is all about us. We are the ones who decide what the bubble we are living in will be like. Will it be a place that will make happy memories for our kids, or will it be a place they would rather forget? This could be an adventure they will never forget for all the reasons we ourselves cherish the adventures in our own life stories. It's up to us. No pressure.

So starting at the beginning:

A sense of calm

Children look to us to create and maintain an emotionally safe harbour, **they can't do that**. That's our job. When we grown-ups practice techniques to manage our own reactions, our stress and our fears we create a calmer 'bubble' for everyone else to live in.

Turn off the media

This is an easy way to create calm. Many of us are in the habit of having non stop media filling in our living space. Constant news casts (and advertisements) exacerbate stress and anxiety, and that infects our bubble and how we will be with each other. If we get our information from the Ministry of Health's Covid 19 website each day we will be up with the play.

When we lose it

We are human, and despite our best efforts we can lose it if we get into overwhelm. Remember, **when our children press our buttons they are not responsible for the buttons that are there**, so don't take it out on them:

1. Stop.
2. Find the gap - that's the gap between the thing that pressed your buttons and you reacting.
3. Breathe. Slowly. Consciously - that just means put your attention on breathing in and out.
4. Put your hand over your heart as you breathe.
5. Work out how you could respond from your heart - and not from your hurt or anger.

Putting our hearts into nurture

Humans need two kinds of nurture or else things go very pear shaped. There's the basic physical nurture like food and a safe place to live, and the emotional nurture only another human heart can provide. If you are wondering what that looks like, it's putting heart into making a simple meal that nurtures both the body and the soul. It's listening to our children's stories and fears through the ears of our heart, and that simple listening builds our children's trust in us to be there for them. If we're not doing 'essential services' in our Bubble, then it's accepting their invitation into their umpteenth game of Last Card. Dealing you in sends a message of togetherness. What comes from the heart touches the heart.



“What can we do?”

This is a big question for all of us, children and adults alike. The key word in this context is do, as in how shall we interact with the three dimensional world? For children it is crucial that they are the heroes and sheros in their own story, in the real three dimensional world, with their imagination, bodies, and souls. This is true at any time but especially now when many choices for independent action have been taken away, and along with that, their sense of having any personal power.

Make things

We're the species with an opposing thumb and we make things. A huge part of our human brain is the result of our ancestors making things with their hands. That urge to make things is alive and well in our kids. When we invite our children to work alongside us in the kitchen, not only do we end up with co-created scones and soup, our children get to feel that they are important players. Their contributions are appreciated and valued as an essential service for our Bubble. There are plenty of tasks that keep your place ticking over that you can do together with your children. The outcome is pretty much decided by the attitude-energy you bring to the job. Any kid can spot the difference when you think, 'It's time you got off the couch and did your share' and 'It's really a pleasure to have this time with you'.



Make more things

Knit a scarf or a blanket for Teddy, make a hut under the feijoa tree, make a blanket hut in the lounge, perfect the mud pie, do a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle, set a Lego challenge, plant out the winter vegetable garden, make some paper maché and go in for models and masks, make an origami crane for each day of this rahui (lockdown) and then make them into a mobile, weave a flax basket, make a frame-by-frame animation, make some cards to send to the people you love who aren't in your bubble. In other words, build anything you and your kids can think of with anything you can get hold of.

Limit entertainment time

Entertainment is great - as entertainment. A bit like icecream is great - as a treat, but not as a person's total nutritional intake. Entertainment is a treat - there's nothing we have to be-do-think. Great though that might seem, our children need to be, to do, and to think. It is their active participation in this world that unfolds their intelligences. That's why making things is so great. It is problem solving in three dimensions with built-in feed-back: either what you are making works or it doesn't. If it doesn't you keep going until you come up with 'workable' solution. That's grit in action right there.

Make your own entertainment

In years gone by families made their own fun because we didn't have television in New Zealand and the internet hadn't been invented. We played games, made music together, played cards, made art and models, and we read a lot. Your family will have lots of ideas, but to get you started, you could organise a talent quest, or make up a play and put on a performance, or take

a favourite song and choreograph it together. You could video any or all of your family's cultural creations and put them up on your smart TV. Or your family could make up your own charade cards based on your experience, favourite songs, favourite people or favourite stories. Our family made up sets of Harry Potter charade cards to entertain ourselves after our weekly family dinner. Too funny.

Limit Screen Time

As much as we might be tempted to park the kids in front of a device for long periods because it shuts them up and stops them fighting, prolonged screen time takes kids out of life and the life out of kids. They don't get to hone their problem-solving skills in real life, nor their 'getting-along-with-people-when-in-conflict' skills when they both want the scissors or the glue. A major developmental crisis is showing up in our schools now as more and more children who have screen time from babyhood onward enter the classroom. And the last but not the least consideration, screens are addictive: full blown, clinically recognised addictive. Which leads on to...

You are there, so be there

Courtesy goes a long way at any time, but it is crucial when you're living in a family bubble. Your children will be looking to you for **connection**, for their information, for their cues and clues as to what's going on in this very different daily reality. Most of us have had kids put their hands either side of our face and look us in the eye. It's a subtle message: they want to know if we are 'on line', they want to know if we are connected. Relationships are two way and so we need to show up and we can't do that when we are scrolling through the phone. There are many things it is courteous to do in private and scrolling through social media is one of them.

Get outside

If you have a back yard, take the play outside. We all know when we take a fractious toddler outside he calms down, so let's act on our own research and go outside with the kids. Humans evolved in nature and research around the world shows very clearly that all of our physiological stress indicators calm down when we are outside in nature - if there aren't mozzies or lions attacking us that is.



Life is an adventure

Humans crave variety, why else would be bungee jump or go on a cruise? We can get creative with adventures in our own patch. I know of families who are packing lunch together with their kids and taking a blanket outside and having a picnic. Simple! You would have lunch anyway, but together you have had a holiday from the same-old-same-old. 'Eating out' can take on new meaning in the evenings while we still have good weather and daylight saving.

Play Play Play

Nurture and play. These are the two absolutely essential requirements that enable the human brain to unfold into its human potential, the more emotional nurture and play the better. Bringing our playful spirits to any task turns living into an adventure.

And Be Kind

Kindness is us at our best, it is us nurturing and caring for each other. We can do this.