



## Family Health Forum: Positive Parenting During the COVID-19 Pandemic Special Olympics Virtual Family Health Forum

### Facilitator's Guide

#### **Suggested Agenda**

Consider the following agenda as a template for a leading a 45-minute to 1-hour virtual Family Health Forum on positive parenting in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Welcome and Introduction to Topic** (10 minutes)
- **Strong Minds Activity** (5 minutes)
- **Guest Speaker or Content Presentation from Program Leader** (20 – 30 minutes)
- **Questions and Discussions with Families** (10 – 15 minutes)

*This agenda is built to connect to parents and caregivers directly; however, it is important to consider your audience and their needs when defining the final agenda. Some families may struggle with finding care for their children, especially during COVID-19, so your Family Health Forum may need to be held in the evening, after bedtime, or consider ways to engage with children as well, if they need to join with their parents or caregivers.*

#### **Guide for Facilitators**

##### **Welcome and Introduction**

Consider using a brief video to start the session and provide a preview of the topics that will be discussed during the Family Health Forum. Suggested videos include:

- UNICEF's [Expert Advice for Families](#)
- Center for Disease Control's [COVID-19: Parents Supporting Children](#)

During your welcome, it is important to establish an environment of support, community, and praise from the very beginning. No parent or caregiver wants to be told they are doing anything wrong. And especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as parents and caregivers juggle new stresses and responsibilities, **it is important to remind your attendees that they are doing great**, and that everyone is doing the best that they can. While the Family Health Forum will provide tips and ideas for managing stress and supporting their child, parents and caregivers need to do whatever is best for themselves and their families during this challenging time. Families, parents, and caregivers who take care of children with intellectual disabilities are strong and resilient and it is normal to feel stressed or anxious in this unprecedented time.

Additionally, consider establishing upfront a way for families to stay connected virtually after the event, using Facebook, WhatsApp or other relevant platforms. This connection will be critical in helping to support families through COVID-19 and beyond. While the Family Health Forum resources are focused on COVID-19, remind families that the tools and materials are valuable for all parents and caregivers, regardless of the situation.

##### **Strong Minds Activity**



Promote the importance of mindfulness and self-care by beginning the Family Health Forum session with a Strong Minds activity, like the [Strong Minds Stress Ball activity](#) or deep breathing exercise.

### **Guest Speaker or Content Presentation**

#### *With a Guest Speaker*

If possible, identify a guest speaker to present on parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guest speaker should use their expertise about parenting and child development to share relevant information with families, using the topics below as a guide. Guest speakers can use PowerPoint slides if comfortable (or other visual methods like videos and pictures), but slides should be kept to minimum so that the Family Health Forum can feel more like an open dialogue than a formal presentation.

Relevant guest speakers could include:

- Local pediatrician, nurse practitioner or family practice doctor
- Child or family psychologist
- Representative from Ministry of Health or Early Childhood
- Representative from local parenting or disability group

#### *Without a Guest Speaker*

Sometimes it may not be possible to identify a pediatric expert or specialist to speak at your Family Health Forum. That is just fine – the Family Health Forum can also be implemented successfully by SO Program staff or volunteers. Consider hosting the session in the following way if you do not have a guest speaker:

- Select three to four topic areas that are most relevant to parents and caregivers participating in the Family Health Forum.
- For each topic area, start by playing one of the videos provided below. The video can provide an expert-guided introduction to the topic. Videos range from 2 to 5 minutes.
- Following the video, use the talking points below to guide families in a discussion on the video and topic overall. Discussions can last approximately 5 to 10 minutes per topic.

Consider conducting the content presentation with minimal PowerPoint slides. Parenting can be a sensitive subject, so many families may respond best to a more personal conversation about the core talking points.

### **Key Messages and Core Content**

*The following content comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics' [Healthy Children](#), Parenting for Lifelong Health's [COVID-19 Parenting](#), and ZERO TO THREE's [Positive Parenting](#).*

There are a variety of topics that can be covered during a Family Health Forum targeting positive parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Make sure to connect with your families prior to the virtual session and understand what questions they have or what information is important and relevant to them.



While many topics can be discussed based on parent feedback, the information below outlines five core content areas that support the health and safety of the child, as well as the mental well-being of the parent. As mentioned above, it is important to encourage parents and caregivers to take care of themselves and remind them that they are doing their best.

## **Talking to your Child about COVID-19**

### *Introductory Video(s)*

- [How to talk to your children about coronavirus](#) (from American Academy of Pediatrics)
- [Talking to your children about coronavirus](#) (from UNICEF)
- [Parent resources for talking about coronavirus](#) (from Child Mind Institute)

### *Supportive Talking Points*

Most children, even younger children, understand that something scary is currently happening in the world. They may learn about the COVID-19 pandemic from the news or conversations with family or may be effected by the change in routine. Honesty and openness can help reassure your child that your family will get through this challenging time together.

- Be open and listen – allow your child to talk and ask questions freely.
- Answer questions simply and honestly. It is okay to share that people are getting sick, but it is helpful to reaffirm that positive actions, like hand washing and staying home, can help the whole family stay healthy.
- It is okay not to know the answers.
- Stay positive and look to the future. Let your child know that things will get better and doctors and scientists are working hard to figure out how to help people who are sick.
- Recognize your child’s feelings verbally. Using phrases like, “I can see that you are upset...” or “I know it is disappointing...” can help your child process what their emotions.
- Be supportive. Give your child space to share how they are feeling and then be there to provide extra hugs and say I love you more. Try setting aside individual time for each of your children. Just 10 to 20 minutes of undivided attention will mean a lot to your child.
- Stick to expert advice. With a lot of false information circulating around, make sure to get important information from organizations like the WHO, US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), UNICEF or American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Use visuals and stories to help children better understand the virus and what the current pandemic means for them (links to examples in the Supplemental Materials section below).
- Focus on decreasing your child’s anxiety related to COVID-19 by avoiding their access to news on internet and TV and/or avoiding frequent exposure to news and unnecessary discussions about COVID-19.

## **Creating Routines and Structures**

### *Introductory Video(s)*

- [Keeping a routine during coronavirus](#) (from Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital)
- [Dealing with disrupted routines](#) (from Autism Speaks)
- [Setting up daily routines](#) (from UCLA’s Center for Autism Research & Treatment)



### *Supportive Talking Points:*

Routines help provide clear expectations, consistency and comfort for many children, especially children with intellectual disabilities. During the pandemic, it is more important than ever to establish a new normal routine. Routines create a sense of order to the day and offer reassurance in a very uncertain time. All children, including teens, benefit from routines that are predictable yet flexible enough to meet the needs of each individual child.

- Create a flexible, but consistent, daily routine.
- Plan out structured activities, but also allow for free time as well. Structured activities can include things like breakfast, active play, schoolwork, chores and bedtime.
- Let your child help create their daily schedule – this will help them invest in and be excited about the schedule.
- Include physical activity and play – like [Young Athletes activities](#) – as part of your daily schedule. Physical activity helps children deal with stress and provides an outlet for energy.
- Bedtime is an important part of your child’s routine, and bedtime can be challenging during stressful periods. Try to keep your normal nighttime routines – with things like bath and story time. Too little sleep makes it more challenging for children to learn and process emotions.
- For older children participating in virtual or home school activities during COVID-19, consider the following suggestions to create a new school environment at home:
  - o Create a quiet and well-lit space to learn.
  - o Monitor your child’s activities on electronic devices and limit the time spent on electronic devices outside school assignments.
  - o Allow breaks for physical activities in between school assignments.
  - o Adjust expectation for virtual classes and homework based on child’s age, attention span and developmental level.

### **Positive Discipline**

#### *Introductory Video*

- [What is positive discipline?](#) (from Parents Magazine)

### *Supportive Talking Points*

As the world deals with COVID-19, everyone has become more concerned about staying safe and healthy – and that includes children too. However, younger children may not have the words to describe the anxieties or worries that they may have. Children may act out during times of stress or exhibit their anxiety and fears through their behavior. Positive discipline can help your child manage their emotions and refocus on positive behaviors.

- Redirect bad behavior. Sometimes children misbehave or act out because they are bored. Find something new for your child to do to keep them engaged.
- Reinforce good behavior. Provide praise to your child when they exhibit good behaviors.
- It is okay to use rewards and privileges to reinforce good behaviors during stressful times.
- Know when to respond. If your child is not doing something dangerous or potentially harmful, ignoring negative behaviors can be an effective way of stopping them.
- Focus on creative and active activities – like Young Athletes! Work with your child to build an obstacle course using materials found in the home and then have fun trying to complete the obstacle course in various ways.



## **Positive Parenting**

### *Supportive Talking Points*

According to Zero to Three (2018), positive parenting describes a set of parent behaviors that fosters a child's capacity to love, trust, explore and learn. Positive parenting techniques can help parents and caregivers guide their child's healthy development within the context of their family and community. The positive parenting techniques outlined below are critical to supporting your child's development at all times; however, can be exceptionally relevant for parenting during times of extreme stress or change.

- Understand or imagine your child's point of view, especially during challenging moments.
- Respond with interest and sensitivity to your child's cues.
- Recognize that parenting can be stressful, and missteps are a natural part of child-rearing.
- Recognize and celebrate your child's strengths, abilities, and capacity to learn and develop.
- Provide consistent, age-appropriate guidelines and limits for your child's behaviors.
- Work towards a balance of meeting your own parental needs and your child's needs.
- Delight in moments of connection with your child.
- Recognize and regulate your own feelings and behaviors before you respond to your child.
- Seek help, support or additional information on parenting when needed.

## **Mindfulness and Taking Care of Yourself**

### *Introductory Video(s)*

- [A moment to yourself](#) (from Sesame Street)
- [Practice mindfulness during the coronavirus pandemic](#) (from the Child Mind Institute)
- [Modeling self-care](#) (from Center for Parent and Teen Communication)

### *Supportive Talking Points*

At all times, but especially during times of added stress, it is important for parents and caregivers to take care of themselves physically and mentally. As you care for your children with intellectual disabilities, remember to care for yourself as well.

- It is important for parents to take care of themselves first to provide the best support for their children.
- Be mindful. Ask yourself how you are feeling and listen to what your body needs.
- Be creative. Creative arts provide an outlet for releasing negative feelings and gaining energy.
- Entertain yourself. Counterbalance the heaviness and stress with something funny or lighthearted each day.
- Meditate or focus on relaxation/deep breathing techniques to manage stress.
- Be active. Move your body every day to release stress and stay physically healthy.
- Find some time for yourself every day to do something you enjoy. Give yourself permission to focus on reducing your own stress and being happy in whatever ways work best for you.
- Find a new hobby or learn something new to stay intellectually stimulated.
- Stay connected with family and friends through regular virtual calls or video chats.



The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents and caregivers that feel especially stressed or overwhelmed should take a few seconds to ask themselves the following questions to help re-frame the problem and handle stress accordingly:

- Does the problem represent an immediate danger?
- How will I feel about this problem tomorrow?
- Is this situation permanent?

### Supplemental Materials

There are lots of supplemental resources, handouts and videos that can be used to support the Family Health Forum conversations with parents and caregivers, including those outlined below. Consider reaching out to others in your community to determine if any localized resources already exist to support families in your community.

- [COVID-19 parenting resources](#) from Parenting for Lifelong Health, who is working with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, the Internet of Good Things, USAID and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
  - o One pager are available in over 70 languages and cover topics like: parenting tips for children with disabilities, keeping children safe online, family budgeting in times of financial stress, helping your family get along at home, learning through play, managing stress, and more.
- Articles on [HealthyChildren.org](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics parenting website)
  - o [2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - o [COVID-19 and Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome in Children](#)
  - o [Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs](#)
  - o [How to help children with developmental disabilities cope during COVID-19](#)
  - o [Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips to Keep the Calm at Home](#)
  - o [Is it OK to see my pediatrician during COVID-19?](#)
  - o [Cloth Face Coverings for Children](#)
  - o [How to Help Children Build Resilience in Uncertain Times](#)
  - o [Return to School During COVID-19](#)
  - o Podcast from Dr. Lynn Davidson on [“How the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts Kids with Special Healthcare Needs.”](#)
- Special Olympics Strong Minds Resources:
  - o [Self-care tips for Special Olympics families](#)
  - o [Tips for keeping a Strong Mind](#)
  - o [Mindful parenting during uncertain times](#)
- Videos from Sesame Street to help children practice mindfulness and establish routines:
  - o [Learn to Belly Breathe with Rosita](#)
  - o [R is for Routine](#)
  - o [Elmo’s Mourning Routine](#)



- Visuals and resources to support children with understanding the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - o [#COVIBOOK](#) – an illustrated storybook to support and reassure children during COVID-19 pandemic (available in 25 languages)
  - o [Social stories on COVID-19](#)
  - o [Germs and Sickness Teaching Story](#) (from Autism Speaks)
  - o [“Don’t Share Germs”](#) and [“Wearing a Mask”](#) Social Stories about staying healthy (from Autism Society of North Carolina)
  - o [“I can’t see my grandparents,”](#) [“No school today”](#) and [“We have to stay home”](#) Social stories to help children with IDD adjust to changes in schedules (from Autism Society of North Carolina)
  
- Resources for managing education at home:
  - o [“How working parents can prepare for Coronavirus Closures”](#) from Harvard Business Review
  - o [“Schools are closing for Coronavirus: now what?”](#) from New York Times
  - o [Building structure and rules at home](#), from the CDC
  - o [“Homeschooling teens and tweens during Coronavirus school closures”](#) from New York Times

### Evaluation

At the end of the session, please remember to have participants complete the Participant Survey. The link may be shared on the interactive platform and participants complete then and/or it can be sent via email or social media as a follow-up.

Link to the survey is available here:

[https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_byl4kr9IX4ze8u1](https://specialolympics.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_byl4kr9IX4ze8u1)

Or

<https://tinyurl.com/VirtualFHF>