



FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS



**Mayim Bialik**

The actress, who also has a Ph.D. in neuroscience, suffered from stress-induced migraines while studying for her degree.

# Acknowledging Stress as a Family

The new normal brought on by the coronavirus spread has caused some serious stress for parents. While they may want to shield their children from that stress, it's important to own it. Here, a local expert offers insight on why — and how.

By Stacey Wincone

"I'm fine."

In the midst of a global pandemic, those two words couldn't be further from the truth for parents who are balancing at-home work, higher-risk on-site work or unemployment with their child's virtual learning and other responsibilities.

We're stressed. And while we want to shield our children from that stress, suppressing that emotion actually doesn't help, according to new research published in the journal *Family Psychology*. In fact, it can cause an emotional disconnect between parents and their children.

It's not surprising, says Laurie Orlando, a lawyer and licensed professional counselor who practices at her own business, Orlando Counseling Services in Shelby Township, in addition to Treeside Psychological Clinic in Lake Orion.

"It's almost impossible to hide parental stress from kids. It is true, in my view, that trying to protect them or shelter them isn't going to work," Orlando says. "Kids are naturally intuitive and especially attuned to the emotion of their caregivers."

That said, if you're telling your child you're OK when you're not, he can feel that emotion — which can be confusing as your mouth is saying one thing but your body language is telling another story.

"Then they worry silently because they can't talk about it, or they act out behaviorally because they're worried about their parents," she notes.

That's why opening up to your children

is key, though there are limits. Here, Orlando offers insight and advice.

## Honest conversations

What was once a normal work day that involved dropping children off at school before heading to an office, for example, has turned into a hybrid of working from home while helping kids with virtual learning. The new normal is stressful, so it's important for parents to own those feelings. If you want your children to be real with you about how they are feeling, you have to be real with them, Orlando notes.

"The right answer is the truth, because you want them to know it's normal to feel all sorts of emotions," she says. "If we model that to our kids and we make it normal that you can talk about feelings without it being a disaster, they are going to learn about that, too."

Acknowledge what you're feeling, but remember your child's age and level of development when deciding how much to share.

The general rule, Orlando says, is to follow your kid. If he or she asks a question, answer it honestly and simply. If your child wants to know more, he or she will ask you a follow-up question, so there's no need to over-respond to that initial inquiry. The goal is to avoid accidentally flooding kids with information they don't need, she explains.

## Coping with stress

Structure, especially now, is important,

but it has to be flexible.

"We should be having some fun. If you make it like an adventure, your young kids are going to think it's fine," Orlando notes.

Find balance by finding time to be together and time to be apart, she suggests. It is critical that everyone is given space and time to attend to an activity quietly and by themselves. When kids are sleeping, that might be the time you sit on the porch to watch the sunset, read a magazine or paint your nails, she says.

Use technology to encourage communication, so kids can see family and friends, play virtual games and more. Set things up for your kid and be nearby in case he or she needs help.

"I think that parents would do well to help their kids look for the blessings or the benefits in this special time together," Orlando says, adding that people often complained prior to COVID-19 that they didn't have enough down time. Use this time to do things that are pleasant, fun or relaxing that you wouldn't have time to do, she suggests.

Teach kids how to slow down and encourage creativity and imagination.

"It's very important for parents to also make sure that they have adequate support virtually," Orlando adds.

Talk to other parents, and make time for Zoom calls with family and friends. In addition, eat regularly, get physical activity and try to relax. Help yourself so you can help your child.

## STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Families across the globe are feeling the impact of the coronavirus crisis — and the balancing act of parenting, teaching and working all under one roof has caused some serious stress for moms and dads.

While we may want to suppress those feelings in front of our kids, it's important for us to express those emotions in a healthy way that shows our children it's OK to have these feelings — and it's important to find ways to cope.

That's why we addressed family stress in this edition of *Opening Minds, Ending Stigma*. We hope you'll share this with other families who are feeling the stress of this time.



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