



The power of atmosphere and how to harness it at your place

COVID-19 has changed the world outside of our family units, but it has also changed the way we live *within* them. With our busy lifestyles, we're just not used to being with each other 24/7. The routines, schedules and boundaries that worked pretty well pre-lockdown only covered the six or so hours a day we actually spent with each other. So there is a solid 10 hours a day of living together that we still need to get the hang of (assuming we all sleep for eight hours!). Which means not only is there uncertainty and unpredictability in the outside world, but there is also uncertainty and unpredictability within our family's world. And, as you've probably noticed at your place already, uncertainty and unpredictability can lead to pretty big emotions and behaviour. In fact, if you're anything like me, you may be increasingly worried that while your family went into the lockdown more or less functioning like the Tanners from Full House, you might come out more like the Griffens from Family Guy, or worse – something resembling the Sopranos! Which means now – more than ever – a positive, supportive and fun family atmosphere is very important.

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A positive, supportive and fun family atmosphere will provide a secure, calm safe-haven for us and our children away from all the chaos of the world. It is through a positive family atmosphere that we will support our brain to shift its focus away from 'survival' and towards strengthening relationships. And science tells us that in turn, those relationships will shield us all – adults and children alike – from the fallout of this stressful situation.

But how do we achieve a positive and supportive family atmosphere? And who is responsible for achieving it in the first place? Well, while all members of the family have to work together to ensure that the family atmosphere is positive, the main responsibility for this lies with the grown-ups. This can be a daunting task – especially given the current circumstances. We strongly urge you to make sure you keep taking [care of yourself](#) so that you have the physical, mental and emotional resources to do dial up the fun!

Positive, supportive and fun: a how-to guide

The following tools are key to creating a positive, supportive and fun family atmosphere.

Honest communication

It may be tempting to shy away from the hard questions your children are asking about the virus and the future. Be brave and answer their questions as truthfully and honestly as you can (according to their age and stage, of course!). Your children want to know that you are a trustworthy source of information and advice. They also want to know that you will always listen, so make time to sit down and listen to their feelings and concerns.

Love and appreciation

With all the distractions of the lockdown, it can be easy to overlook simple – but important – things like saying “I love you” or “Thank you”. We will be asking more of our children than usual (mine have never unloaded the dishwasher as often as they have since the lockdown began!). Even though we have general expectations of our kids when it comes to basic chores, we still want to thank them (or the other adults in the house!) for their contributions. But don’t restrict gratitude to words – show it with your actions. Why not surprise your children with an unexpected treat to show your appreciation for them playing so well together? Or why not switch the TV off for a game of backyard cricket or Nerf gun wars?

Respect each other

We all have expectations of how our children should talk to us and others but we’re prone to forget that it goes both ways. So in this time of uncertainty and stress, be mindful not to fall into the trap of sarcastic, patronising or cutting remarks. And try not to yell. Model to your children what respectful interactions look like. Respect your children’s different personalities and ‘talents’ and make sure everyone else does too. This doesn’t come naturally to children (or adults). Setting some routines and boundaries to ensure respectful behaviour may be helpful. Simple, clear rules like “Use kind words”, “Clean up after yourself” and “Listen to each other” cover all ages and stages. Keeping clear bedtime and morning routines may also ensure that no one is too tired to be respectful.

Cooperating and working together isn’t limited to chores. Great, cooperative family times can be had while doing a puzzle together, designing obstacle courses together or teaching each other fun, new skills with technology.

Work together

To make the family routines run smoothly during lockdown, it’s not unreasonable to expect that all family members contribute to the daily running of the household. The key is making sure that the chores are age-appropriate and the expectations for how and when they should be completed are clear. Keep in mind, however, that cooperating and working together isn’t limited to chores. Great, cooperative family times can be had while doing a puzzle together, designing obstacle courses together or teaching each other fun, new skills with technology. This is especially true if you get your kids to teach you something. TikTok really is doing some powerful work in households throughout the nation right now!

Spend time together. Aren’t we all doing that already? Yes, but the reality is we can be surrounded by people and still feel isolated and alone. Just because all family members are cooped up within four walls, it doesn’t necessarily mean the time we’re spending together is quality relationship-building time. As parents we actually need to be intentional to make sure that this lockdown is a time

when family memories were made – not just a blur of Netflix series, wasted PVA glue or forgotten e-learning passwords.

For more on this topic...

- [Pause, Hold, Engage to rescue and restore the atmosphere](#)
 - [First things first: Self-care for family well-being](#)
 - [Pause, Hold, Engage: A simple strategy for complex problems \(Tools to support parents\)](#)
 - [Pause, Hold, Engage: Helping kids cope with big feelings \(Tools to support children\)](#)
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Looking for more personalised strategies and solutions for your family?

Our family coaches are still available during the lockdown and can meet with you online. We've also introduced a shorter 30-minute appointment type, to make things easier while you navigate family life with everyone at home.

[Learn more](#)

About Author

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Linde-Marie is our Child and Family Psychologist at Parenting Place. On top of her clinical practice work, she also works in our research team developing and evaluating our parenting programmes. She is Christchurch-based and in her free-time loves to explore the Port Hills and surrounding areas. Linde-Marie has a blog where she shares her thoughts and experiences on parenting her two teenage children. You can email Linde-Marie at lindemarie.amersfoort@parentingplace.nz or read her blog [here](#).

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