



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



FAMILY

CHILDREN

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Flexibility and learning to adapt to change are core elements of resilience. During times of stress, our families can lose structure and routines can be disrupted. If this happens, it is important to establish new or adjusted routines while providing stability. When we do this, we help to make children's lives predictable, stable, safe and secure and encourage them to embrace a growth mindset.

Flexibility with Changes in Routines

There are several ways to help our children embrace changes to their daily routines:

- **Talk about changes.** Talk about what will change and how it will change. For example, many children are now learning from home, and those who are going to school may be learning in new ways. It is important to talk to our children about why these changes are necessary and how we can adapt to them.
- **Involve children in decisions about the change.** It is important to encourage our children to help think of new things we can do to adapt to the change.
- **Try to keep other routines as consistent as possible.** When changes happen, remember that children still need consistency in their lives. Focus on maintaining routines that are still within our control.
- **Demonstrate that change can be a positive thing.** Talk about change in a positive way. When we face change with positivity, our children will too.

The above information was adapted from [Helping Children Deal with Change](#).

Changes in routines can be more difficult for some children. For example, children with autism may view change as a disruption to their lives. To learn about how to help children with autism adjust to change, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism offers support through [COVID-19 visuals and social narratives](#) and [transitioning back to school during COVID](#).

Adapting to Change Activity

Invite your child to learn about change as they play the *Freeze Game*.

- Play music as your child dances. When you stop the music, ask your child to freeze in place. Continue playing the game for several minutes as your child learns to freeze when the music stops.
- Then, change the rules a bit. Tell your child that the rules are changing and now they will do different motions each time they hear the music play. You may wish to say a different motion for your child to do, or find music online that contains directions for each new movement. [This example encourages children to hop and swim.](#)
- Games such as the *Freeze Game* can help your child to better understand that things sometimes change and we need to change how we do things! [Learn more about teaching children how to adapt to change.](#)

To learn more about the science behind the importance of adapting to change, you may wish to read the below research:

- [‘Give us a break!’: using a solution focused programme to help young people cope with loss and negative change](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUTH

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Youth can have either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset, and sometimes they switch between the two. According to Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, youth with a fixed mindset believe that skills, intelligence, and talents cannot be changed in a meaningful way. On the other hand, youth with a growth mindset believe their skills and intelligence can grow with effort, learning and persistence. A growth mindset fosters motivation, resilience and determination in youth, while a fixed mindset creates a sense of importance and can help our teens to adapt to change and to learn that being flexible is okay.

Promoting a Growth Mindset

- **Remind your teen that “a brain can grow.”** The brain is flexible, it never stops growing. This is exciting because it means your brain, with time and effort, can grow stronger.
- **Praise the process, not the results.** For example, instead of saying, “I am thrilled you worked hard to save money for a new jacket,” reward the effort by saying, “You didn’t give up. You worked hard and it paid off. Great job!”
- **Reward persistence.** Acknowledge your teen’s hard work and persistence. When you see this in action, let them know. Example: “You’re really trying hard and taking your time to learn. Way to be persistent!”
- **Use the word “yet.”** When your teen says “I can’t,” remind them that they “can’t, yet.”
- **Link praise to something specific.** Instead of saying, “You’re really smart,” try “You took the time to think of creative ways to solve the problem. You kept trying even when some of the strategies didn’t work. Great job!”
- **Failure is an opportunity to learn.** Talk positively about failures and mistakes (both yours and your teen’s). For example, talk to your teen about what they learned when something didn’t go as planned.
- **Don’t be tough on your teen if they don’t succeed at something.** Instead, gently explore what happened and help them to make a plan for next time. You might ask, “What have you learned that can help?”
- **Encourage your teen to make constructive self-statements.** Some examples might include, “I work hard,” “I am a creative person,” “I enjoy learning and discovering,” or “I care about others.”

Growth Mindset Activity

Conversations with your teen are a wonderful way to encourage growth mindset development. Consider the following questions to get a conversation started:

- What did you do today that took a lot of thought?
- What happened today that made you keep going despite wanting to stop? What strategies did you try?
- What did your mistake teach you? What did you learn from it?
- Did you try something today that was really hard? What made it hard?
- What will/did you do to challenge yourself today?
- What will you do to solve this problem?

Learn more about growth mindset by viewing [The Power of Believing That You Can Improve.](#)

To learn more about the science behind growth mindset, you may wish to read the below research:

- [A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement](#)
- [Fixed and Growth Mindset in Education and How Grit Helps Students Persist in the Face of Adversity](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUNG ADULTS

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Since the start of the pandemic, we have adapted to unprecedented situations. These adaptations may have related to areas such as school or work, where we live, or how we socialize; we've changed how we exist in the world. The flexibility that our families have shown as it relates to weddings, attending classes and events at colleges and universities, and other events that would have typically been celebrated with large gatherings is important to recognize. Some, or perhaps most, of those changes weren't actually our choice; the government, our employers or schools, and perhaps even our family, required us to change our way of living to keep ourselves and others safe.

But others of those adaptations were absolutely our own decisions — how we cope, the ways we stay connected to others, and the efforts we make to find the positives in a predominantly negative situation. Those adaptations may seem trivial, but they're not, because what they signal is our ability to be flexible, which is a quality that has innumerable benefits. From being able to learn and integrate information quickly, to solving problems creatively, to rapidly adjusting to new situations, cognitive flexibility is a key trait that allows people to succeed in all different kinds of contexts, including social, academic, occupational, etc. (Verdolin, 2019). So why not take up this opportunity — when we're primed for flexibility and adaptability — to build up those cognitive flexibility skills even more!

Video Resources

- [Three Ways to Measure Your Adaptability and How to Improve It](#)
- [Purdue Graduate Featured on Some Good News](#)

Internal Actions

Dr. Jennifer Verdolin has these suggestions for increasing your cognitive flexibility ([via Psychology Today](#)):

1. Do something you know how to do, but do it differently (and often)
2. Pursue new challenges and experiences
3. Meet new people

External Actions

- Talk with your family about how your daily, weekly, and maybe even monthly routines have changed. **Which ones would you like to keep, even after restrictions on movement and physical contact end?**

For additional reading on the research behind cognitive flexibility read [Getting a Grip on Cognitive Flexibility](#)



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



FAMILY

OLDER ADULTS

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

For many older adults, life is full of changes and adjustments to new circumstances. Many of life's changes are expected, and a normal part of growing older. But life during a pandemic is neither expected nor does it allow us to follow our "normal" way of doing things. Helping each other during sudden changes in life is an important part of reclaiming calm and order. Older adults can help themselves and other family members weather the sudden changes by showing leadership and encouraging a "growth mindset" in the midst of crises.

Sharing Strengths

Older adults can display strong leadership in a family by sharing past experiences. This sharing can help family members to better make sense of challenges and how to overcome them. Communication about family strengths and how these strengths help make meaning of adversity, is an important part of fostering resilience in families.

Sharing Strengths Activity

This activity can be done virtually or through a phone call for family members who cannot join in person. Family members may also wish to write down their strengths and send them in the mail. Prior to the activity, ask each family member to bring something meaningful or prepare a story about something meaningful that reminds them of challenges faced during the pandemic. One at a time, encourage your family members to describe their item or tell their story, why it is meaningful to them, and how they overcame the challenge. After each family member has had a chance to share, you may wish to continue the conversation with the below questions:

- What is one thing you appreciate more about your family since the pandemic started?
- What is one strength of each family member?
- What is one skill or strength you are proud to have? It may be something you appreciate more since COVID-19 occurred or something you didn't realize the importance of prior to the pandemic.
- How has that strength or skill helped you to overcome a challenge?

The above activity was adapted from the [Strengthening Families Program](#).

To learn more about the science behind how sharing strengths with others helps improve the well-being of the giver and receiver, you may wish to read the below research:

- [When Helping Helps: Autonomous Motivation for Prosocial Behavior and Its Influence on Well-Being for the Helper and Recipient](#)
- [Can Helping Others Help You Find Meaning In Life?](#)



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



FAMILY

Our Family is Adaptable! Flexibility to Change

Flexibility and adapting to change builds resilience in us all. During a crisis, our lives can become disrupted. Family traditions and in-person celebrations may have to be cancelled or postponed. We may seek continuity and connection. Changing or creating new traditions can restore stability and family connection. Sharing traditions connects us to each other by linking the past, present, and future.

Below are some ways you and your family can foster family traditions to adapt to the changes brought on by the pandemic.

Create, Change, or Start a New Tradition

What are some family traditions that cannot be celebrated in the way they once were? What are other ways your family can honor those traditions?

- Family cookouts, wedding showers, and other celebrations can be turned into virtual gatherings.
- Birthdays can be honored by organizing a car parade, decorating the person's home with birthday signs, or having social distanced visits.
- Have a front porch sitting night. Consider organizing an event where families gather on porches, in a park, or in a community space while social distancing. Encourage social distanced conversations to build a sense of connectedness. Families may enjoy making signs to cheer each other, playing music, and safely interacting with family and friends.

When routines and plans are altered, it can also be a great opportunity to start something new. What's something your family has always wanted to do? It can be as simple as starting a pizza and movie night or a game night. Online platforms can make it possible for your family members who are living away to join in the fun.

Share family meals in new ways. Maybe cooking and eating family meals together isn't possible right now. There are other ways families can experience the traditions and connection that comes from family meals. Some ideas are to:

- Gather family recipes in one place. It can be compiled into a cookbook, a collection of index cards in a recipe box, or a digital collection. Choose a recipe to make with a family member or friend on the same day. Share how it went, how it tasted, and what it reminded you of.
- *Write a recipe story.* There is often more to a recipe than ingredients and instructions. Do certain recipes bring back memories? Are there meals you only have at certain times of the year? How have recipes changed in the family over time? Including these details along with a recipe is a great way to preserve family history. You may also wish to audio or video record the story.
- Make a new family recipe. Family members can join in the effort even in separate homes. One idea is to make freezer jam. Making freezer jam is a great way to welcome spring and early summer crops like rhubarb, raspberries and strawberries. [Find a simple recipe here](#) — you only need a few ingredients!

To learn more about the science behind the importance of family rituals and traditions, you may wish to read [Family Rituals in New Zealand Families: Links to Family Cohesion and Adolescents' Well-Being](#).