

Module IV

Promoting Positive Actions and Positive Emotions

During a stressful time it is natural for us to focus on problems, what is wrong, what is lacking, what is bothersome, what is irritating, what is not working, what we don't like. Some of this thinking cannot be avoided, but too much of this thinking throughout the family can create a culture of negativity, prolonged ruminating, and conditions of chronic stress. We can interrupt the cycle of negativity, calm the mind and promote feelings of well-being by creating opportunities in the family for positive actions that lead to positive, calming emotions.

People become their best selves when inspired by positive emotions from positive actions. With children out of school for an extended precautionary period due to the Coronavirus pandemic, families need everyone to be their best selves. Furthermore, children develop increased trust and security when experiencing certain positive emotions (e.g., when experiencing gratitude or admiration). They are more open, flexible and patient. They are inspired to help, to listen, and to cooperate.

Take advantage of these unusual circumstances to bring the family together as a team to determine what each member can do to help out the family. Maybe you could call this their Family Contribution. Try to match people to their strengths with what they like to do, what they do well, and instead of assigning "chores" and commanding children to do them, establish a culture of community service, community service within the family, where everyone expects to contribute and fulfill responsibilities, everyone is valued for their strengths, what they can contribute, and everyone has a chance to play an important role.

People feel better in a stressful situation if they are active, rather than passive, if they feel like they're doing something to improve their situation. There is a lot that individuals cannot control during this pandemic precautionary period, so people in the family will feel better, less stressed, more assured, if they are engaged in making their situation better.

Make a list of what the family needs. Ask the children what they think they could do to help out the family. Sometimes children can think of things that the adults would never think of and this is an opportunity to show that everyone's ideas are respected. Here are some examples of how children could contribute to the family. Undoubtedly, if given the chance, they can think of many more creative ideas.

- Keeping specific areas neat and picked up
- Setting up for dinner
- Selecting and playing music that everyone likes
- Researching movies to watch
- Reading to a younger sibling
- Organizing the games that others might like
- Helping with meal preparation
- Making a lunch
- Playing a game (however boring) with a younger sibling
- Keeping the visual schedule up to date
- Assisting with making new routines
- Showing others how to use access electronics
- Folding clean clothes
- Sweeping an area that collects dirt

Wiping off counters

Write down and display what everyone is planning to do to help the family. It helps establish a positive mindset within the family to see a visual display of the collective efforts of others in the family to help each other.

Keep the list growing, occasionally ask for volunteers to help with a task that isn't on the list.

Ensure that all family members are represented on the list. Everyone should have the chance to feel important, to feel like they are contributing.

Use this list to deliver recognition, to thank people and to encourage everyone to do the same (see Module V on Expressing Gratitude and Appreciation).

Module V

Expressing Gratitude and Appreciation

Everyone feels more relaxed, secure, cared for, and safe in the presence of a compassionate person. Compassionate people are sensitive to the needs of others and they try to help others in need, but they also recognize the kindness of others, easily show appreciation, and often express gratitude. Those who can recognize the kindness of others, those who can appreciate what others have contributed or done well, are people who will feel more calm and settled themselves and will have a settling effect on those around them.

Use this unique opportunity to create a culture of kindness and compassion in the family. Small acts of kindness should be openly appreciated. Establish a family definition of what is kind and compassionate. Show leadership in your family by showing them what kindness and compassion looks like. This culture will promote physical as well as emotional health and well-being for your family.

In this family, people will be kind and giving, they will help each other, do things for each other, listen to each other, be polite, share, compliment each other, try to understand each other, appreciate each other, be patient with each other, and encourage each other.

Parents should model the act of "appreciating" throughout the day. Don't let a day pass without showing an abundance of appreciation. That is your chance to interrupt and reset your own stress response while teaching your children how to do the same.

I really appreciate how patient you are with your little brother. He likes playing with you, and even though he doesn't know how to play the game the right way, you still try to make it work. Your patience helps this family and I just wanted you to know I appreciate it.

The family room is so neat and picked up. Thank you so much for helping. I really appreciate how good you are at organizing things and making things neat.

Right now, this is what I notice about you. You are so gentle with your baby brother and he really likes time with you. You are a very caring person.

After modeling appreciation, periodically ask children to tell you something they appreciate about their family or someone in their family. Ask them to notice when others are kind or helpful or caring and thoughtful. This could be a topic at meal time or bed time or when children transition out of solitary/quiet time (see Module III).

Let your children know that you are counting on them to report on the kindness of other family members. When they do this, you can show them your appreciation for their thoughtfulness and give them recognition for their ability to appreciate others. When children sharpen their skills in recognizing kindness in others, when their brains get better at seeing kindness, children start seeing "the good" all around them and this has a settling effect on their stress.

Here are just some examples that show the level of kindness we want children to be able to recognize and appreciate and demonstrate themselves (so they can also see themselves as giving people).

Another child agreed to play the game you wanted to play

Someone really listened to you and took you seriously when you had something to say

Someone gave you a compliment
Another person helped you with one of your jobs for the family
Someone was super patient in showing you how to do something
A child made a drawing to brighten up the room
A child shared a favorite toy or shared art supplies
Someone took time to show you how to make something
A parent made a snack that they knew you would really like
Someone picked up and put away your toys for you