

Balancing Parenting, Professionalism, and a Pandemic (Oh My!)

Kari Adamsons, Ph.D.

Human Development and Family Sciences

October 23, 2020

**REMEMBER THAT TIME WHEN WE
LIVED IN PRECEDENTED DAYS?
THAT WAS AWESOME!**



SAY "IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES" ONE MORE TIME



I DARE YOU

imgflip.com

You are not
imagining it –
it's stressful!

Chronic

- Anxiety about the pandemic/safety
- Missing "normal" activities, lack of coping outlets
- Missing people, isolation and/or Not having alone time
- Grief/loss
- Worry about the future
- Unknown/uncertainty
- Compassion fatigue
- Online fatigue

In-the-moment

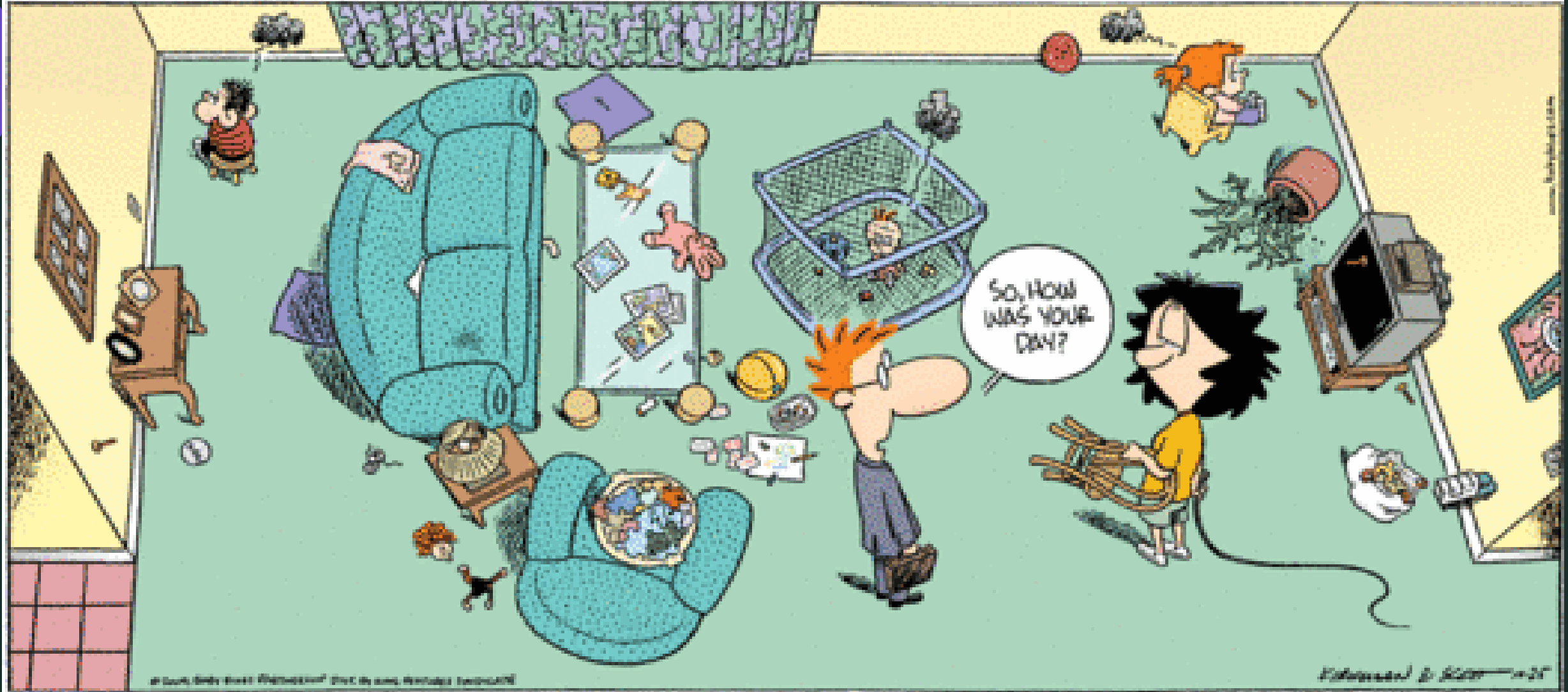
- Competing space needs with family members
- Distractions
- Deadlines
- Changed (and often added) job expectations/duties/schedules
- Things take longer
- Managing children's learning (remote or in-person)
- Children's stressors
- Your own stressors

Ambiguous Loss

- Situations where loss is difficult to define and not concrete, indefinite
 - Someone is physically present but mentally/emotionally absent
 - Someone is physically absent but mentally/emotionally present
- Loss is uncertain, indefinite – could include things as well as people
- How to cope?
 - Learn to live with the both and because the situation is uncertain and may never resolve completely
 - Create meaning from the loss/situation

BABY BLUES

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT



© 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

Kirkman & Scott 1-25



So, what do we do??

A stylized purple pencil icon is positioned diagonally on a green background. The pencil has a purple eraser at the top, a purple body, and a purple lead tip with a small hole. The green background is part of a larger graphic element that curves around the pencil.

Identify your stressors

- Writing things down can make things more concrete and less overwhelming
- Identifying the stressor helps you figure out how to deal with it
- Change what you can, when you can, learn to live with what you can't
 - Living with uncertainty
 - Coping with ambiguous loss



This works with kids too!

- Scaffold them in learning to identify and deal with their stressors too (in age appropriate ways)
- What are the things that are challenging them? (to problem solve)
- What are the things that are working well for them? (to build on)
- Validate their feelings!
 - Don't turn it into a competition of whose stressors are real or worse

Brainstorm solutions

- Just because everything changed at once, doesn't mean we can/should fix everything at once
- Change one or two things each day – don't try to fix everything at once
- "Today I will work on ..."
- Be creative and think outside the box because we aren't living within our usual boxes anymore
- Be gentle with yourself and others while experimenting with solutions and struggling with challenges

Boundaries – Set them, live them, love them

- You are probably used to having some space/time to yourself
- That space/time is probably gone
- So boundaries are ESPECIALLY important when everyone is home more and in each other's space without work/school/normal activities
- Boundaries might be physical (closed door, different rooms) or symbolic ("Wear a headset so others aren't disturbed by your meeting/lesson")

Adjust Your Expectations

(you are probably already learning all the “new skills” you can handle right now)

Pandemic productivity: How to acquire new skills during lockdown

Disruption to how we live and work may make it more important than ever to upskill



© Tue, May 19, 2020, 00:00

Peter McGuire



Disruption to how we live and work may make it more important than ever to upskill. Photograph: iStock

 When digital marketer [Jeremy Haynes](#) tweeted recently about the opportunity to learn new skills during the pandemic, he didn't expect the message to go viral.

  “If you don't come out of this quarantine with either: (1) a new skill; (2) starting what you've been putting off like a new business; (3) more knowledge; you didn't ever lack the time, you lacked the discipline.”

Importance of Self Care

Put on your own oxygen mask before helping others

Everyone is exhausted. **You** also are allowed to be exhausted.

What are things you find "recharging" and replenishing?

- Might be alone time, might be connection with others, might be both!
- Set aside time for those things on a regular basis
- Put them in your calendar

Kids can do more than we think they can

- It's a lot about culture
 - In Japan, travel by subway by themselves to run errands at 7
 - In Polynesia, preschoolers are caring for younger children
 - In Vietnam and China, some children are potty trained by 9 months
 - In Denmark, children are left outside in strollers to get "fresh air" while parents eat or shop, and in Norway, one-year-olds commonly nap in strollers outdoors at state-sponsored child care... in winter
- How can you adjust your household "culture"?

Respond to children's stress rather than *Reacting*

- Take a deep breath
- Take time to THINK! (This is part of being able to understand)
- The power of positive thinking - reframe, reframe, reframe
- De-escalate the cycle. Remember, YOU are the adult and the role model they are learning from.
 - What are they learning from your response?
- Reacting in kind only leads to greater escalation
 - No one naturally responds to screaming and yelling by suddenly calming down (unless it's out of fear, which is also not productive and shuts down actual learning)
- Being calm allows you to still think rather than just reacting, and to respond in intentional ways
- Remember the boy who cried wolf?
 - If you yell all the time, they tune it out

Use I-statements

- When people (including children) feel attacked, they get defensive, and conflict escalates.
- Most conflicts end the way they begin. So, practice “soft start-ups” by using I-Statements
- I-Statements
 - Is more than just starting a sentence with “I”
 - “I hate you” is not an I-Statement
 - Focuses on how YOU feel and are affected, rather than attacking the child
 - “I feel frustrated when you keep interrupting me while I’m trying to talk on the phone.”
 - Helps children learn the impact of their behaviors on others
 - **It’s ok to say you feel negative emotions** like anger, hurt, or sadness, and this models how to appropriately express them
 - “I feel sad when you don’t treat your sister nicely” or “I’m angry that you broke my favorite necklace after I told you not to play with it.”
- Focus on/remember your ultimate goal for the interaction

The Importance of Encouragement

What's the difference
between praise and
encouragement?

Both can be effective, but
praise (especially if
overused) can get diluted in
its effectiveness and can
actually decrease risk taking

General tips:

Be specific rather than
vague ("That was really
helpful of you to help me
clean the dishes" vs. "Nice
job")

Focus on internal rather than
external judgments ("You
must be so proud" vs. "I'm
so proud of you")

Focus on effort ("You really
have been practicing hard")
rather than competition ("I'm
so proud of you for
winning")

Encourage along the way,
rather than only praising at
the end.

Show Appreciation (for everyone)

- Don't forget to have positive conversations too!
 - "Catch" people (including your spouse! And your co-workers!) being helpful, and express your appreciation
 - Say "thank you" for things, even if they are "expected" or "part of their job." People like feeling appreciated
 - Be specific

How to have challenging conversations

- **Address issues when you are calm**, NOT in the heat of the moment
- **AND ALSO deal with issues promptly** - don't "save up" complaints (leads to kitchen sinking)
- **Scheduled family meetings** can be a great way to clear the air on a regular basis
 - Be sure to point out good things during the meetings too!
- **Use soft start up techniques**
 - Use I-Statements
 - Avoid "never" and "always"
 - Use "critical sandwiches" - positive thing, criticism, positive thing

How to have challenging conversations

- **Use positive words** when setting expectations
 - “Please make sure to get this done by the deadline!” vs. “Don’t miss this deadline!”
- **Engage in *complaints* not *criticisms***
 - Key is focusing on ***behavioral description***, not character assassination
- **Take time-outs if you need to**
 - They’re not just for kids

Attitude is everything!

Remember that this is your loved one, who is currently being annoying, rather than your enemy

People in a positive frame of mind assume the best. People in a negative frame of mind assume the worst. Note that in either case, the actual intentions of the other person don't matter!

Put yourself (and them) in a positive frame of mind:

- Think of three things that you genuinely like and respect about the person, particularly heading into conversations or interactions that you anticipate will be difficult
- Practice critical "sandwiches" - start and end with something positive, put anything negative in the middle

Sometimes, Children (and Parents) Need More

- It's ok to ask for help
- Parenting is the toughest job out there! There are numerous resources out there, so don't be afraid to use them for yourself and/or your children!
- Just a few examples:
 - Counselors/therapists
 - Behavioral therapists
 - Parenting education classes
 - Support groups
 - Be wary of "self-help" books – some are helpful, but many are garbage and it can be hard to tell the difference

Be kind and
give grace
freely

To others, AND YOURSELF

No one is at their best right now. Including you. AND THAT'S OK. Repeat that. Again.

Remember that self care slide? Seriously, do it.

- It's good for you
- It's good to model for those around you. Teach your kids to do self care and it will serve them well for a lifetime!

QUESTIONS?

