



Families in Tight Quarters: Tips for Managing Big Emotions at All Ages

For families, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a lot of time together under one roof. At times, it can be fun to be connected and spending large amounts of time together. At other times, this can feel overwhelming for all members of the family—as if there is no escape and no break. Like with grief, the feelings of pain and joy can coexist, and they ebb and flow throughout each day. These uncertain times bring up anxiety, fear, and confusion in all of us. For kids of all ages those are big and difficult feelings, and can cause tension, fights, frustration, and misunderstandings. In a stressful time like this, big emotions are going to happen, but practicing activities that help regulate these emotions can help everyone in your family.

To support families, the Wendt Center has collected some of our favorite regulating activities. We have chosen two for each age group – one for expressing energy in a playful way and one for bringing the energy level down using the breath. By practicing these activities as a family each day, your bodies and minds will get comfortable with them. Then when you really need them, you will know just what to do.

For young children - 5 years and under

Shake It Out

- Take a moment to notice your body, head to toe. What is it saying to you?
- Shake out your right hand, left hand, right foot, left foot five times each.
- Repeat this, shaking four times, three times, two times, then only one time!
- Take another moment to notice your body, head to toe. What is it saying to you now?

Drain Breaths

- Imagine your arms are a water faucet and hold them out straight in front of you.
- Squeeze your fists tight and breathe in SLOWLY.
- Release your fists and breath out, making a "woosh" sound like water is flowing through you.

For elementary schoolers - 6-10 years

Raw and Cooked Noodle

- Get some upbeat music playing.
- While the music is playing, dance around like you're a cooked noodle, loose and wiggly.
- Pause the music and FREEZE like you're now a raw noodle. Hold that for a few seconds.
- Start the music back and resume dancing like cooked noodles.
- Repeat as many times as you like! See if you noticed how your body changed throughout.

Hat Breathing

- Put on your imaginary hat - hold it tight to your head.
- Lift the hat above your head as you breathe in slowly through your nose.
- Lower the hat back to your head as you slowly breathe out through your mouth.

For middle schoolers - 11-14 years

Chair Pulls

- Sit up straight in your chair with your feet firmly on the ground.
- Reach your hands down and grab underneath the seat of your chair.
- Pull tight on the chair while pulling your shoulders up as high as you can. Hold for five seconds.
- Drop your shoulders and relax your grip on the chair seat while letting out all the tension.
- Repeat at least three times. How did your body feel after each time?

Take Five Breathing

- Spread your fingers out on one hand like you are about to give a high-five
- Place your opposite hand's pointer finger at the base of your thumb.
- SLOWLY inhale as you move the pointer finger up the thumb, pausing slightly when you reach the tip of the thumb.
- Exhale SLOWLY as your pointer finger moves down the other side of your thumb.
- Repeat for all of your fingers in a continuous motion.

For high schoolers - 15 years and older

Finding the Beat

- Choose a song that you enjoy and brings you energy.
- Listen closely for the beat.
- Use your hands to clap or tap on a surface, following the beat of the song.
- Now switch to your feet - see if you can stomp or tap your toes to the beat.
- Try to combine the two - feet and hands - to follow the beat of the song.
- See if you can notice which parts of your body feel more active and alert now.

Grounding Breaths

- Select a small object that you can hold or have close (rock, piece of jewelry, ball, etc...).
- Focus your senses and thoughts on the small object.
- For 10 breaths, breathe slowly while focusing your attention on the object.
- If other thoughts jump in - silently state to yourself "I am here now, this is where I need to be," and refocus your attention onto the object while breathing in and out.

How To Use These Activities

It is most helpful if you make a plan for when you will practice these techniques – you can start your day with a grounding activity, try one before starting work and school, take a break with one at the top of every hour, practice one before each meal, or use one to symbolize the end of the work and school day. The key is to be in touch with your body and emotions, respond with care to emotions, and most importantly connect as a family.