



In today's challenging times, it can be difficult to make sense of the information available and plan for your family and loved ones' needs while taking care of yourself. More than ever, it's a time to be **SMART** about what we do and the decisions that we make. However, sometimes it's difficult to know what to do and how to start. With that in mind, let's take a deep breath and get started doing what works for you, but as importantly let's do it **SMART!** So, let's get started using the suggestions below.

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## Schedule

Sticking to schedules provides an anchor for children and adults alike. If you are struggling with establishing a schedule, **NOW** is a great time. It doesn't have to be hour by hour. Start simple. Below is a starting point:

- Rise time
- Breakfast
- Morning activities/tasks
- Scheduled break for games/active time
- Lunch
- Afternoon activities/tasks
- Scheduled break for games/active time
- Dinner
- Evening activities/tasks
- Bedtime

Once you are comfortable with the fundamental basics/structure, start adding some details: exercise/meditation, work on projects, meal prep, spend quality time with family/friends etc.—the more specific the better.

No matter what's going on in your day, having and knowing the schedule can be a real comfort — a consistent routine helps manage uncertainty, especially in challenging times. **Schedules are particularly important if you are new to working from home and/or if children are home due to the closing of schools.**

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## Meaningful Moments

Most have heard the expression, "Moments Count", but what does that mean? According to Sandra Magsamen, an expert on living your life with heart, "We must communicate to our children every day that they are loved. However, sometimes words alone are not enough to express what we most want to say." Here are ways to make lasting bonds:

- Hugs are GREAT! However, in a time that suggests "Social Distancing" we need to identify another method as simple as an open armed hug, a wink, a tug on the ear or anything that shows love, compassion, care and respect.
- Read...Read...Read LOTS of books to children. Put time aside each day to look at, read and share stories. You can read different books or read the same books numerous times.
- Get down on the floor and play, make puzzles, finger paint, roll around and laugh together. And tell them you love them, that they are special, that they are unique and that they are a gift.
- Assure that everyone knows they are loved and will be OK regardless of what is happening. But "Everything will be OK", may be better said, "We will be honest about what is happening", "Our family is strong and we stick together."

### **While similar tactics work with adults, there are some differences. Consider:**

Dan Heath and his brother Chip, co-authors of Power of Moments, recognize that, "every event/activity is not a memorable moment". So, what makes a Memorable Moment? The Heath brothers tell us to "Remember the 3 S's":

- **Sensory**—Boost sensory appeal. Instead of ordering carry-out, create a great meal (engage the children if possible) and share it with loved ones but also set a beautiful table and put flowers on the table. That becomes a memory.
- **Stakes**—Engaging in any activity is more exciting than just watching an event. Think of activities that allow you to be engaged vs. just sitting. Be actively involved vs. passively sitting.
- **Script**—While consistency is important, create a real Memorable Moment by doing something different. Even a cup of coffee, "Shake it up a bit." Try a special cup, a new variety of coffee, share it with a friend, maybe even virtually!

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# Accountable Actions

We all like it when family, friends and co-workers keep their promises—in other words you will be able to count on them. That is often known as being “accountable”. When the goal is accountability, it often provokes fear, not empathy? See accountability as the effect — not the goal.

When handled correctly, accountability happens naturally. People own their mistakes and take positive steps forward. Let’s look at some examples and how one might achieve improved accountable actions.

## **SITUATION 1**

Time and time again, you and your child/grandchild argue about doing homework. It has become even more challenging now that many of the schools have closed and schooling has been added to the list of household responsibilities.

### **Common conversation**

Parent or Grandparent: “How many times do I need to tell you to do your school work? I shouldn’t have to harp on you all the time to do what you are told to do. It’s not my fault that they have closed the schools.”

Child: “But Mom, you are always on my case about my schoolwork. Besides homework is SO boring, it’s all worksheets.”

Parent or Grandparent: “Don’t Mom me. Go to your room and get your assignments done. NOW!”

### **Alternative conversation:**

Parent or Grandparent: “I see that you haven’t been working on your assignments, and instead you are playing video games. I understand this is a “new” school situation, but we need to work through this together. I’ll set the timer for five more minutes so you can finish your game. Then we can go over what needs to be done and how best to get it accomplished.”

Child: “OK. I’ll be down in five minutes.”

Parent or Grandparent: “Thanks. In the meantime, I’ll clean off the table and we can figure out a plan.”

## **SITUATION 2**

For the third consecutive month, husband and wife are arguing about the overdraft notice.

### **Common conversation**

Spouse 1 “Look at this! I got another overdraft notice. Do you know how much these cost? This is the third month this has happened. Where did all the money go? What did you buy this time?”

Spouse 2 “Don’t make such a big deal. The overdraft is only \$30.00.”

Spouse 1 “Fine, I’ll just take care of the checkbook myself.”

### **Alternative conversation:**

Spouse 1 “We got another overdraft notice today. I can’t understand why we are in this situation again. I’m also concerned about the expenses associated with the overdrafts. I know we watch our spending.”

Spouse 2 “I don’t know what happens to the money. I don’t feel that I spend foolishly either.”

Spouse 1 “Let’s block out two hours tomorrow evening to develop a solution, so we look at the expenses and see where we might be able to fine tune our spending.”

# Responsible Reactions/Decision Making

With that in mind, how can individuals and/or families be responsible for their reactions to their current situation? The simple answer is learning how to make wise, effective decisions.

## DEFINE AND ANALYZE THE PROBLEM:

- The identified problem must be accurate and specific. Problems can range from difficulty meeting the expectations at home, or work, to choosing whether to complete homework, or even deciding to engage in unhealthy, morally, and/or unethical behavior.
- Avoid using words that cannot be measured. For example:
  - Instead of saying, “We are spending too much money.” Alternately try, “For the last three months, our expenses are 15% more than our income”. “I need to get more exercise.” Try saying, “I will schedule exercise five times per week for at least 30 minutes.” One can be even more specific, for example, “I will add walking for one hour of each day from 2:00-3:00 on my calendar.” The more specific and measurable, the more likely it will happen.
- Once you have identified the problem, the next step is to analyze the situation from a variety of angles, what impact will this have on others. Think as wide as possible. Resist thinking of the process as being negative or pessimistic. Instead, think of it as a growth/learning opportunity.
- Remember, in many decisions you are in control. If you have less control, identify a personal “value system” to keep your reactions/decisions in check.

## IDENTIFY SUGGESTIONS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

- Look at the situation from multiple angles.
- Identifying how and why the problem arose. This is a great time to learn from each other.
- Different family members will most likely have different suggestions.
- Even if the suggestions offered by younger family members are unrealistic, resist the urge to criticize the suggestion. Doing so often leads to closing the communication vs. opening the lines of communication.



## CHOOSE AND EVALUATE POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS

- For each suggestion, identify pros and cons.
- Start with a large paper attached to a wall or solid surface.
- Gather a marker. Make sure that it doesn't bleed through the paper.
- Assign a recorder. He/she summarizes the process.
- Everyone makes one suggestion. Anyone may “pass” their chance. Be creative to identify who is suggesting the option. This can be as simple as wearing a special hat, or they may hold something to represent a “talking stick”. The options are endless. Have some fun with this process.
- After all suggestions are exhausted, identify the pros and cons of each suggestion.
- Discuss any unexpected consequences.
- Evaluate the suggestions and develop a plan. Note that not all suggestions need to be implemented; however, be sure to take suggestions seriously. Doing so lends credibility to the idea and can build self-esteem in family members.

## ESTABLISH SPECIFIC TIMELINE AND PERSON/S RESPONSIBLE FOR EACH TASK

- For chosen suggestions, establish specific timelines, along with the person/s responsible for each task.
- Remember age appropriateness for tasks assigned.

## DISCUSS SUGGESTIONS SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES

- What worked—why did it work
- What needs improvement or refining

## REPEAT PROCESS AS NEEDED

- This is an ongoing process.
- Responsible reactions are part of everyday life.

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# **Try Something New**

There are many benefits to doing new things – don't cheat yourself out of them.

Larry Alton, contributor to Huffington Post, identifies these Benefits of Trying New Things:

- Generally, fear is the primary reason to avoid new things. Instead ask yourself "What if I find it really enjoyable?"
- Trying something new is a great opportunity to find out more about yourself.
- Creativity is often the result of trying something new.
- When you engage in activities, you become more interesting and it can make you more marketable.



Keep in mind what might be new to you may not be new to your neighbor. Here's a starting point:

1. Make a list of countries that you know little about. Select a country and start exploring. Learn about their culture, try to learn a phrase in their native language, create a meal focusing on some of their foods, etc.
2. Take out a cookbook. Select various recipes and try them out. Enlist children to be your helpers. There are numerous lessons involved in food preparations, math, reading, science, etc.
3. What hobbies have you wanted to learn or improve? Connect with someone to help.
4. Writing letters is almost a lost art. Send someone a quick note. Invite neighbor children to write notes, draw pictures, etc. to shut-ins. If you are not into writing, pick up the phone and give them a call.
5. Start journaling. It can be thematic or random. Options include: thoughts of gratitude, signs of nature, new food experiences, favorite quotes. The list is endless.

## **ON-LINE RESOURCES\*\***

### **HEALTH SITES**

- [National Institutes of Health](#)
- [American Diabetes Association](#)
- [My Food Advisor](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Family Doctor.org](#)
- [HeartHub](#)

### **ACADEMIC EDUCATIONAL SITES**

- [ResearchGate](#)
- [iSeek Education](#)
- [Microsoft Academic \(MA\)](#)
- [Google Scholar](#)
- [Educational Resources Information Center \(ERIC\)](#)

### **CHILDREN'S LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

- [PBS KIDS](#)
- [MathGames](#)
- [National Geographic Kids](#)
- [ReadWriteThink](#)
- [ClassDojo](#)
- [Biblionasium](#)

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