

# How to stay calm and manage those family tensions during the coronavirus lockdown

May 13 2020, by Winnifred Louis and Tom Denson

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The coronavirus restrictions are slowly being eased but the pressures on families at home still probably lead to many tears of frustration.

It could be tensions about noise and clutter, keeping up with home schooling and mums and dads torn between parenting and their own

work duties.

So to make sure our memories of being locked in with our families are as positive as possible, here are some evidence-based tips for calming down, preventing conflict and dealing with any [sibling rivalry](#).

## **Take a deep breath**

If you feel yourself getting angry at something, breathe in while counting to three. Then breathe out slowly counting to six (or any patterns with a slower out breath). If you do this ten times you should notice yourself [becoming calmer](#).

If you're too agitated to breathe slowly, put your [hands on your heart](#) and simply wait until you feel more relaxed. Try counting to ten or 100 [before you react](#).

Leave the room and take a break. Plan to deal with the niggles another time. When you're on break, [do something to distract yourself](#) like make a drink, listen to music, look at a beautiful picture or play a video game that is absorbing.

Call a [friend](#) or [professional helpline](#) to help you get another perspective, especially if you feel scared or hurt.

Different strategies work for different people, so try them all. Encourage your kids to keep trying if they don't initially succeed. You need to practice any skill to make it feel natural. For [younger children](#), taking a break may be [simpler](#) to master.

## **Ease the tension before things blow**

It's good to calm down from explosions but it's even better if you can reduce the build-up in the first place.

Take time to [share some of the problems](#) upsetting people and see if as family you can negotiate a solution.

It's likely everyone in your family is more tense because of the COVID-19 crisis. Many aspects can't be easily fixed, like lost work or money stress, but others can, such as creating new routines or sharing space, resources or chores.

Work out different ways to get exercise indoors, like games or apps. [Plan ahead](#) for the times that need extra care, like when people are tired, or if difficult tasks need finishing. Let others know what to expect.

And importantly, [lower expectations](#) for everyone. What used to be easy might now be hard, and that's okay.

## **Control the emotions**

Help everyone work on [managing their emotions](#). Just because you are experiencing extra distress doesn't mean you should snap at your loved ones.

You need to grow your [toolkit](#) of things that make you feel calmer and happier when you're under pressure.

It could be spending time talking about what is going right and what is okay, working with your hands, meditation or prayer, time with your partner, reading or learning something new.

Every day, take time do something from your toolkit to chill out.

## Talk to each other

When the tension is lower, quiet family conversations can help by [naming any stresses](#). Naming things like "this is a stressful time" or "I'm a bit grumpy about work today" helps children process emotions.

It's important to [actively listen](#) to others and [celebrate strengths](#).

Listening and repeating back what others say makes people feel heard, and so does acknowledging shared feelings ("I miss my friends too"). When parents calmly talk about how some things cannot be easily changed, it [builds acceptance](#).

Over time, the most powerful thing to prevent explosions is to [notice when anger is building](#) so you can deal with it before things escalate.

It's useful to reflect on [questions](#) such as "Will this matter in 20 years?" and "Am I taking this too personally?"

You can help children by exploring [what might really be bothering](#) them. That argument about a toy might be about feeling sad. Try to listen for the deeper message, so they feel understood.

## Calm that sibling rivalry

If sibling rivalry is driving you to distraction, the good news is [it does not](#) mean there is something wrong. Low-level sibling bickering is common during times of tension and boredom.

But you should [step in](#) when the volume goes up with nasty name-calling or physical contact.

Acknowledge emotions, help the kids express what they feel and encourage empathy. Try to help them decide what's fair, instead of imposing your view.

More serious incidents require you to stop the interaction. If there is harm, separate the kids, care for the hurt child and consider a consequence. Use time-outs to calm things down, not for punishment.

But like all conflict, [prevention](#) is better than punishment. Does one child need more attention, exercise, stimulation or structure? Do certain toys need to be put away, or shared?

Depending on the age of your children, you can help older kids to learn to react gently to provocation. Praise children when they take steps to manage their stress.

Remember, these are stressful times for many families around the world. If we can use this time to stay patient, manage tension and act with goodwill towards our loved ones, our families will be better equipped to weather COVID-19, and many other storms that will follow.

For more help and information see our [website](#) or go to [1800Respect](#) and [No To Violence](#).

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