

## INSIGHTS

### Parenting in challenging times



Life has a way of throwing curve balls that really test the strength and resilience of families. Personal tragedy, natural disasters and global pandemics are the types of events that challenge us all to the core, testing our emotional and social resources.

When difficulties occur children look to the adults in their lives to maintain their security and safety. When change and uncertainty reigns, kids want strong, empathetic leadership from the significant adults in their world. As a parent it can be difficult responding to a child's needs when you're trying to adjust to changes that are forced on you.

Following are some elements to consider when parenting through times of challenge, change and difficulty:

#### Attention

Like a television antenna your attention is tuned to pick up the strongest signal. In times of difficulty a child may not necessarily signal that they are struggling, so you may need to fine tune your attention to pick up their needs. Start to notice the small comments and subtle behavioural changes, as they may not be small at all, and can provide helpful clues to their state of mind.

#### Priorities

In challenging times your focus may need to shift away from schoolwork, household neatness and chores. It can move toward relationship building, maintaining wellbeing and helping each other out. Parental priorities need to shift to the immediate rather than the future, the emotional instead of the behavioural and from thriving mode to survival mode in tough times.

#### Permission

Children and young people often struggle to express their feelings and thoughts in the face of adversity. They look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance about how they should respond to change, loss, uncertainty and disappointment. Allow them to speak about how they are feeling. Prompt conversations through closeness and connection. Display your own vulnerability and in doing so give your kids the permission they need to express themselves in safe ways.

#### Collaboration

Difficult times will invariably suit a family that enjoys a collaborative, close parenting style. In collaborative families kids feel listened to and also have an ability to impact family decision making. Shared mealtimes and regular family gatherings are generally a prominent feature of collaborative families. In difficult times those families that prosper are those that value and promote close connection between siblings and parents.

#### Wellbeing

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Child and parent wellbeing becomes paramount in times of hardship. That may mean reprioritising the importance of school and work, doing something joyful every day and practising regular wellbeing strategies such as exercise, mindfulness, deep breathing and spending time in nature. The wellbeing bucket needs to be regularly refilled during challenging times.

These five elements form the basis of a planned parent response when major difficulties occur. Be patient, be kind to yourself and be willing to reach out to the wider community for help.



## Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.