



# Parenting

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[that choice on March 17](#), and other states [like New Jersey](#) have indicated they may do the same. As parents across the country brace for having their kids underfoot for months, away from their friends and the comforting routines of school, many of our readers have asked: Should I be concerned about any potential long-term damage that a lengthy quarantine may have on my child?

First, let's be clear — the new coronavirus pandemic is a unique, once-in-a-lifetime situation. So any existing research on children won't capture the exact contours of this scenario. That said, we do have studies on how certain stressors like natural disasters and war can impact the long-term health of kids. The psychologist, pediatrician and child advocates I spoke to said that the research on how [Hurricane Katrina](#) and [World War II](#) affected children can be particularly instructive.

One big takeaway from that research is that the children who had “safe, stable and nurturing relationships” before those disasters had better outcomes, said Rahil Briggs, Psy.D., national director of Zero to Three's HealthySteps program, which supports the well-being of babies and toddlers. Therefore, she continued, it's unlikely the vast majority of children who come from stable homes will be affected negatively by the pandemic in the long term.

“The most important thing is for children to have caring adults that they're engaged with,” said Sherrie Westin, president of social impact and philanthropy for Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind “Sesame Street.”

Long-term studies on children in England, for instance, found that kids who were separated from their parents during World War II (to keep them safe from bombings in London) were [more likely to have insecure attachment styles](#) and lower levels of psychological well-being decades later, compared with those who stayed with their parents, [even while being bombed](#).

What about delays in learning? That's another big concern for parents — “we have all sorts of data about the summer slide,” Dr. Briggs said, referring to the [loss of learning that children experience over the summer](#), but we have no idea

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[Education](#), though we don't know how it will turn out.

The biggest concern among all the experts I spoke to is that these months out of school will exacerbate the gap between the most fortunate and the most vulnerable children — educationally, psychologically and physically. Children from financially unstable families may not have ready access to the devices they need for online learning — an estimated 300,000 children in New York City alone do not have the tablets or computers they require, Richard Carranza, New York's schools chancellor, said in [an interview](#) with NY1.

By the fifth grade, said Betsy Zorio, vice president of U.S. programs and advocacy for the nonprofit organization Save the Children, poor children can be “up to three years behind more affluent kids because of summer learning loss.” The impact of school closures from the new coronavirus may cause that gap to widen.

In big cities, underserved children may not have access to outdoor space as playgrounds close. They might not be getting the meals, structure and warmth they usually get from their teachers, which can set them back physically and emotionally. Parental unemployment was among several factors linked to [an increased risk of post-traumatic stress symptoms](#) in children who lived through Hurricane Katrina.

Organizations like Save the Children and Sesame Workshop are mobilizing to help kids by getting meals delivered to food-insecure children and creating resources, but people who have the means should help others whenever possible, too — here's [how to do it](#).

Darby Saxbe, Ph.D, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Southern California, said she was particularly worried about children who might be maltreated while sheltering in place. “For high-conflict families that are prone to aggression, sheltering at home in a small family unit could be not just challenging, but dangerous,” she said. There have already [been reports](#) of a spike in child abuse cases in Fort Worth, which doctors there could not definitively link to the new coronavirus outbreak, but “it's hard to think that it's just coincidental,” Dr. Jamye Coffman, M.D., the medical director of the Center

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easy — on them or on their children. Children who are prone to anxiety may find this period especially challenging. But all the experts I spoke to emphasized that routine and simple affection are important.

Even in the healthiest families, “You’re probably going to see increased [tantrums](#), [challenges with sleep](#) or behavioral issues as folks acclimate to a new normal for a while,” said Dr. Briggs. But, we need to “trust in the foundation we’ve built with our children,” she said. “It will help us to ride this out.”

*P.S. [Click here to read all NYT Parenting coverage on coronavirus](#). Read last week’s newsletter, which was about [how parents can relieve their own stress during this anxiety-provoking time](#). Follow us on Instagram [@NYTParenting](#). Join [us on Facebook](#). Find [us on Twitter](#) for the latest updates.*

## Want More on Families and Coronavirus?

- Some hospitals in New York City, the current epicenter of the outbreak in the United States, [are banning partners from the delivery room](#). “I have so much anxiety now and literally have not stopped crying after hearing that my husband can’t be with me,” Samantha Moshen, who is due in June, told our reporters Christina Caron and Katie Van Syckle.
- We’re a broken record about routine, but [here are some tips](#) for creating structure around your children’s school days from Katharine Hill, a learning specialist in Brooklyn.
- You’re probably desperate for your kids to nap regularly, if they’re not right now. Craig Canapari, M.D., director of the Pediatric Sleep Center at Yale New Haven Hospital, [has some advice for your little nap refusers](#).
- If you want to know what it is like to get a child tested for Covid-19, Kinsey Gidick has an [essay about the anxious and agonizing process](#).

## Tiny Victories

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make her special soup when it's time for a wash. — *Trenda Gajjala Reeves, Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J.*

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