



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES:

HOW TO COMMUNICATE AND CONNECT WITH YOUR KIDS

YOGA 



SELF AND STUDENT CARE MINI SERIES: MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

AN INTRODUCTION

While caregivers always juggle uncertainty when it comes to raising a family, the volatility of changes in family dynamics brought on by the current pandemic is unprecedented. Caregivers have had to shift their work, social, and family lives to meet rapidly shifting circumstances that come with little warning and without any instructions or guidance.

Suddenly, caregivers find themselves asked to do more with less. They're asked to support the at-home learning of their children while confronting other novel stressors within their family system, including working from home and sourcing childcare under new public health restrictions, plus maintaining daily household operations on top of these.

Caregivers, we want you to know that you are not alone. We hear you, we feel you, and we are here to support you.

The latest mental health research validates what so many of us are experiencing. According to a study by [Prime, Wade and Browne](#), "Social (or physical) distancing has resulted in virtually all children in the world staying home from school, alongside many parents who have either been laid off or are working from home. In the event that parents are still working, routines are similarly disrupted in that children are staying home while parents are away and alternative childcare arrangements are required. Whatever the case, the basic mechanics of daily life have been seriously disrupted."

As impactful as these times have been on each of us as adults, we further acknowledge the unique ways this pandemic impacts our youth. Children and teens are spending less time with their peers, which can influence mood, behavior and mental health, as well as affect their healthy development.

Youth and adults alike—ourselves at Yoga Ed. included—are cycling through thoughts of “I’m fine, we’re fine” and “we are definitely not fine.”

Beyond these inconsistencies in outlook, however, research points to the unique protective factors of the family system. [The power of relationships](#) and the development of a core family belief system have been shown to help families weather the storms of adversity.

Through experience as caregivers, we realize these protective factors seem easier said than done. When we are stretched thin, we tend to feel more alone, ineffective and overwhelmed. With this toolkit, we provide you with accessible practices for connection and resilience that we hope will help you lean into this reassurance: **We are all in this together.**

In this toolkit, you will find tangible, effective tools to nurture healthy communication and connection as we navigate this uncertain time. Feel free to use one of these tools or all of these tools in whatever ways work best for you. However you arrive at these tools—for yourself, for the youth in your life, for your family—is more than enough.

This toolkit is designed as a resource for caregivers in order to:

- Better understand your own mental health needs and the needs of the youth in your life,
- Provide ideas for sustaining self-care practices, and
- Create connections between caregivers and youth.



Important note: This toolkit is not a substitute for individualized professional care from a doctor or therapist. The effects of stress and anxiety can be debilitating to everyday routines, and in some cases the guidance of a healthcare professional is necessary.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

In order for our children/students to show up as the **balanced, healthy human beings** we want them to be, we must first show up as such ourselves. The space for inner connection can be as simple as taking a deep breath in and a deep breath out.

TOOL: B.R.E.A.T.H.E. ASSESSMENT



BENEFITS:

- + Maintain awareness of basic needs
- + Identify any areas in need of support
- + Help create a plan for self-sustenance

TOOL: B.R.E.A.T.H.E. ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Use the B.R.E.A.T.H.E. acronym to practice this quick assessment for your personal self-care needs.

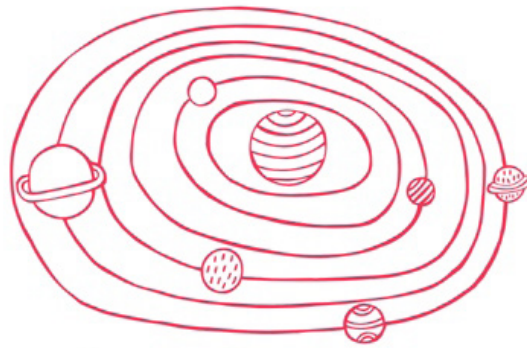
1. B is for Body = How is your body feeling? Do you need water, a healthy snack, or some movement?
2. R is for Restore = How is your sleep? Can you take a pause right now to breathe? Do you need more time to rest?
3. E is for Express = Are you expressing yourself through self-talk, journaling, or other creative outlets?
4. A is for Allow = Are you in the present moment? Are you allowing yourself to feel your feelings?
5. T is for Talk = Are you communicating with your support system or family? What does that look like? Spoken words, written notes, text messages?
6. H is for Heart = How are you showing love to yourself? To your loved ones?
7. E is for Emotion = Check in emotionally and mentally. What feelings/emotions are you experiencing? What are they telling you?

Feel free to make this B.R.E.A.T.H.E. acronym your own. You can make it part of a daily practice: set a reminder on your phone, make it a regular journal prompt, or use it as a way to start or end the day, such as a reflection practice in your morning or evening.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

TOOL: INSPIRATION CIRCLE



INSPIRATION CIRCLE

BENEFITS:

- + Creativity
- + Focus
- + Gratitude

INSTRUCTIONS:

On a piece of paper, draw a circular pattern. It can be an abstract pattern, or you can put yourself at the center of the circle like a nucleus. Draw or write around you all the different things that make you who you are and represent the different aspects of your life. This is an Inspiration Circle.

Teaching Note:

Circles represent wholeness. They model the organizational structure of life itself. They remind us, like cells in the body or stars in the sky, that each of us is separate and also part of a much larger, even infinite, world that extends both within and beyond our bodies and minds. Circles appear in all aspects of life: the celestial circles we call Earth, sun, and moon, as well as conceptual circles of friends, family and community.

SELF-CARE

TOOL: LAYERS (RELAXATION) [VIEW VIDEO](#)



BENEFITS:

- + Self-compassion
- + Release tension
- + Relieve symptoms of stress

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read or paraphrase the following script.

1. “Close your eyes, breathe, and rest. As if you’re falling asleep, let go of all thoughts. Just feel your breath. I’ll wait for everyone to settle, sigh and melt. Release any movement and tension. When you’re silent and still, I’ll know you are ready to listen. With every breath, you become more and more calm. Great.
2. “With kindness and non-judgment, bring awareness to yourself as you see yourself. Picture fully your whole being and notice what or if any feelings start to arise. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in those feelings, then breathe them out.
3. “Now, imagine seeing yourself as a collection of layers—a carefully and beautifully stacked arrangement of all the pieces that you are.

TOOL: LAYERS (RELAXATION) (CONTINUED)

4. “Start with your top most layer, the external. Perhaps, this is who you imagine people see you as, or who you want people to see you as. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in this layer, and breathe out as you peel that layer away.
5. “Take a moment to think about what’s underneath. What makes up that second layer of you. Maybe the person you are to your friends, or even your family. What’s different or the same about this layer? Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in this layer, breathe out and let it peel away.
6. “The third layer is who you are to yourself, the internal, who no one else truly knows, except for you. This may be a place of vulnerability, of uncertainty, or of strength and resilience, or even creativity and that which is still yet to be discovered. Breathe in and breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Before you peel this layer away, ask yourself: How can I make this part of myself feel more loved, supported, and appreciated?
7. “As emotions or sensations arise, use your breath as a reminder to acknowledge the positive and release the negative.
8. “I’ll give you a few moments to reflect. Continue breathing at your pace.”
9. Pause for a few moments.
10. “Take a deep breath in, and deep breath out. Breathe in that which makes you uniquely you, and breath out anything holding you back. Breathe in all the layers as they work together, and breathe out any unhelpful expectations of yourself. As you breathe, experience you, exactly as you are.
11. “Now, it’s time to come back to the room. Gently begin to move your fingers and your toes. Take any final movements that feel good to you in your body. When you are ready, come back to a comfortable seated position in your chair.”



SELF-CARE

TOOL: GROUNDING BREATH



BENEFITS:

- + Increases breath awareness
- + Increases connection between brain and body

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin sitting in your chair with your feet on the floor.
2. Inhale, lift your right leg up a few inches.
3. Exhale, place your right foot back down, feeling all parts of your foot connect to the floor.
4. Inhale, lift your left foot up a few inches.
5. Exhale, place your left foot back down, feeling all parts of your foot connect to the floor.
6. Repeat, doing both sides again.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

TOOL: MIRRORS (WITH STUDENT/CAREGIVER)



BENEFITS:

- + Coordination
- + Cooperation
- + Focus
- + Physical awareness
- + Trust
- + Teamwork
- + Empathy

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Participants spread out in the space. Stand one to two feet apart facing each other and decide who will be the “mover(s)” and who will be the “mirror(s).”
2. Using different yoga poses, the mover moves into the poses slowly and smoothly while the mirror mirrors those movements. Movers can gradually speed up as long as the mirrors can follow.
3. After three minutes, players switch roles.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

TOOL: DOUBLE TREE



PHYSICAL

BENEFITS:

- + Lengthens the spine
- + Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, hamstrings, abdominals, back and neck
- + Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, chest, and shoulders

MENTAL BENEFITS:

- + Develops communication
- + Builds trust

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin in Mountain Pose next to your partner.
2. Inhale, bring your outside foot like a kickstand to your inside leg.
3. Exhale, bring your inside palm to touch your partner's.
4. Inhale, press into your partner's palm, reaching your arms overhead.
5. Exhale, bring your outside arm up to the sky.
6. Breathe.
7. When you and your partner are ready, slowly bring your arms down and place your outside foot on the floor.
8. Feel free to include all members of your household to create a double tree circle or a "family forest."

Creative Language:

Imagine your arms are the branches of the tree. Feel solidly anchored by the roots of your feet. Challenge your balance by swaying in the wind.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

TOOL: STRIKE A POSE (GAME FOR QUALITY TIME)



BENEFITS:

- + Cooperation
- + Memory
- + Creativity
- + Physical awareness
- + Spatial awareness

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Appoint a leader.
2. Invite all household members to stand in front of their chairs.
3. Music is played, and while music is on all participants dance or move around their chair.
4. Music is paused, and household members move quickly and carefully back to the front of their chair.
5. The leader calls out a yoga pose or breathing exercise to do.
6. Take turns being the leader each round.

Enrichment Options:

- Invite each member of the household to pick a song.
- You can make style suggestions for each movement section, such as “like a robot” or “as if you’re walking through pudding.”

CREATING CONNECTIONS

TOOL: S.N.O.W. (STICKY NOTES ON THE WALL)



BENEFITS:

- + Increase communication
- + Creativity
- + Shares the love

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Using sticky notes, a whiteboard, or other form of writing, share a kind thought, an encouraging word, or an inspiring quote with your household.
2. Find a spot that is accessible to all in your home to share or post these messages. Examples include a kitchen refrigerator, a bulletin board, or a bathroom mirror.
3. Invite your household to contribute and share.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

TOOL: HOUSEHOLD MISSION STATEMENT

IN OUR HOUSEHOLD:

WE VALUE _____

WE BELIEVE _____

WE TRUST _____

WE SAY _____

WE ARE _____

BENEFITS:

- + Creates household cohesion
- + Improves listening skills
- + Encourages cooperation

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Create a list of words to describe your family.
2. Put these words together into a statement.
3. Additional option: Turn your statements into a work of art using images or collage.

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