



Parenting during pandemic

Day 29: Pivoting or chasing your tail. Added social pressures during the pandemic

Before the pandemic, we had an awareness of social norms or the unwritten rules about how we should all behave in different situations. Now with social distancing and lockdown, we are in unfamiliar situations and so we look for cues and clues about how we should behave based largely on what others are doing. We look at things like social proof and feel peer pressure around what we are doing and what we should be doing.

For example, you may notice that if you go out at the moment you are acutely aware of what others are doing about keeping to the social distancing rules. You may be thinking about (and to some extent judging) people based on where they are standing or whether they are with or without gloves/face covering etc. The judgements you make will be different for different people. For example, you may think the person at the supermarket checkout should be wearing gloves but be less concerned about whether all of the customers in the supermarket are wearing gloves.

You may have seen or heard about businesses “pivoting” in response to their current situation. Many have moved to, or are moving to, online systems and/or changing other aspects of what they do to try to cope with changed ways of interacting with people while still trying to bring value and make money. For parents, “pivoting” might mean keeping up with all of the pivoting at work and the pivoting at our children’s schools. It might mean pivoting our social interactions with friends and family as well as pivoting the social interactions of our children with their friends and family. All of this pivoting can feel like just running in circles or chasing your tail.

One of the things making all of this feel like chasing your tail rather than pivoting to some positive new outcome is the fact that it’s all new and the situation is unfamiliar. It takes us time as we develop to understand the social norms and parents often have an acute awareness of this because we have to tell our children about the social rules sometimes. For example, we may explain that if someone is speaking we are expected to listen and not interrupt or talk over them. We may explain that it’s polite to let someone else go first at

times or show our children how to turn take. These are all social rules that children learn over time by socially interacting in the real world.

It may be helpful to think about where some of the current pressure is coming from. Some of it is from external sources telling us how we should do things right now. This could be work and our children's schools setting tasks and expectations; it could be friends, family, media and social media telling us how others are doing things right now; it could be from advertising telling us we need to have certain things right now to be managing; it could be from external advice like these blogs. While there is a lot of potential pressure from external sources, there are also pressures we place on ourselves as internal sources of pressure. If we are setting expectations of everything being perfect right now, this is likely to be unrealistic. If we try to do a bit of everything we can feel that nothing is really being done very well. If we give up and do nothing then we are not likely to feel good as there is little to give us a sense of achievement.

One potential way to manage some of this is to think about the allowances we are making for others right now. How many times since the start of lockdown have you heard people say "bear with us" and "we are doing the best we can" and "it will take time"? In most cases we are fairly accepting of these things at the moment because we are aware that we are in an unfamiliar situation. So, if you are feeling like your attempts to pivot into some new positive are leaving you feeling dizzy from chasing your tail, do yourself the same courtesy, "bear with" yourself, do the best YOU can and accept that it will take time. If this is difficult to do, imagine that your difficulties were not your own but belonged to a friend and think about what you would tell them to do. Or, think about what a friend or trusted person would tell you to do right now – or ask them for help and support where possible.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Tomorrow's topic: Keeping your own promise to never miss an important moment with your children

Please contact us with questions, comments or topics you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.