



## Parenting during pandemic

### Day 32: Irritated by the small stuff?

We have noticed some discussion in the media and on social media about people feeling easily irritated or even angry over things that would usually just be mildly irritating. We therefore thought it may be helpful to think about this in today's blog.

You may remember from previous blogs that we have considered our natural responses to the pandemic and said that it is typical to feel anxious right now because there is something to be anxious about – coronavirus. When we are anxious or stressed, our system that deals with that is triggered. This is called our fight or flight response. Essentially this is the system that tells us if we are in immediate danger then we should run from it or fight it. There are a few other things that some people do when faced with danger but these are the main two and we know that fight or flight responses are common to both the animal and human world.

When there is a “danger” around, such as coronavirus, our fight or flight reaction can be stimulated. When the system is stimulated, part of allowing us to survive any danger is that we have a heightened sense of threat from potential dangers. We become extra alert to things. This may be one of the reasons why we feel irritated by the little things right now because we are extra alert to danger and while the little things may not be dangerous, they do take some of our time and attention, which our system may think is unnecessarily directing some precious resources away from looking for and managing “dangers” right now.

So we can feel annoyed by the little things usually. We are maybe a bit more annoyed due to our fight or flight response sensitising us to danger and being annoyed at wasting resources on little things.

We've talked in other blogs about added pressures on us right now, such as shifting social norms and this added pressure can make us quicker to react as well. Added to this is the fact that we don't have all of our usual coping mechanisms such as going out, seeing friends and family, asking someone to look after the children so we can catch up on some things. These and other factors may mean we are irritated by small things right now and quicker to react to things.

If you notice that you are more irritated or quicker to react to things right now, it may be helpful to try some breathing and relaxation techniques. These techniques are designed to change what is happening in our bodies when we feel stressed. With regard to breathing, we tend to take short, shallow, quick breaths as part of our fight or flight reaction so taking some long, slow, deep breaths changes what is happening in our bodies and slows everything down for a few seconds. There are lots of relaxation techniques and it might be worth spending some time thinking about what works for you around relaxation. It might be physical things like yoga, pilates or having a warm bath; or it might be listening to relaxing music; or maybe trying some visualisation, such as picturing yourself on a beach somewhere for a few minutes. It may also be helpful to do something you enjoy or that you know tends to make you feel good, such as watching a comedy or reading a book.

For parents, it is also important to note that everyone at home will have their moments, particularly during the heightened emotion of the pandemic and lockdown. It may be helpful to think about what helps each person feel better and what they enjoy so that you can suggest these things if you notice they are struggling. You may not get a positive response at the time but that's just because of how they are feeling at the time and it's important not to take this personally. If there are a few people struggling at the same time, it might be worth thinking about activities you can all do together versus those you can do separately and working out the timing of these to suit what's happening at the time. This is against our advice about planning and routines but sometimes things happen and it's important to manage that too.

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

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.