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This One Is For The Parents

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.” - Jon Kabat-Zinn

About thirty seconds after Gov. Baker declared on Wednesday that we’ll be doing remote schooling until May 4th, my phone began pinging with notifications. While people anticipated this *might* happen, it turns out that this – being at home -- *is* happening, and not just for three weeks. Of course, we all need to stay safe and healthy amid a global pandemic. Of course, this is for the best as we deal with a terrifying virus. Our most primal survivalist and mama/papa grizzly protectionist instincts are on high alert as we prioritize physical safety and health.

But can we be real for a moment? Sometimes this whole “Little House on the Prairie with Electronics” thing feels rough.

Sometimes, we can’t get our kids out of bed, we can’t get them to email teachers, and we can’t make sure they are doing schoolwork. Sometimes, we know they’re on their third hour straight playing video games, that they haven’t gone outside or that they’ve been binge-watching *Stranger Things* all day. Sometimes, there is a suspect odor in the room because someone didn’t shower yesterday and didn’t seem to remember what toothpaste is for. Sometimes, the stir-crazy feeling kicks in, and we remember we’re only on week two of social distancing. We can’t monitor our kids’ every move, nor should we. We’re busy working (...and we’re not all working from home!), wiping down countertops, cooking family dinners, handwashing for 20 seconds and going on hunter-gatherer-like quests for toilet paper. Sometimes it all feels like it’s falling apart. Sometimes, as parents, we even feel like failures. And even if we know that we decidedly *ARE NOT* failures, there are moments when we go there, when we *feel* that way. And boy, in that moment, is it ever real.

After the Governor made his decree Wednesday afternoon, the text messages arrived from friends, the Facebook posts were ubiquitous, and one of my relatives reached out with the question so many parents are thinking: *how am I going to do this?* And so, just like we let our students know how best to adjust to home learning, here are a few ideas for any parent who has ever felt less than perfect, especially during this time of incredibly high stress:

1. **Practice self-care.** I cannot emphasize this enough. Take a few minutes for yourself. Practice deep breathing. Do things that fill your soul. Engage in self-care. Challenge that internal dialogue that sometimes gets loud and is so much harsher than anything you would ever say to your best friend. Take another deep breath. Go for a walk outside, have a cup of tea, do yoga. Use your adult coloring book, bake brownies at 10pm, walk

your dog, pet your cat if she lets you, take time to create a delicious smoothie in the morning. Make sure that in every day, there are moments just for you. Modeling self-care for everyone in your home-bound world is good for the family unit. And don't forget the deep breathing.

2. **Connect.** Zoom calls, texts, emails, phone calls, Facetime. Stay in touch with those you love. A few of my extrovert friends report that being away from people is hard. My introvert friends (who are already pretty good at social distancing) report that while being apart is more natural, they like being invited to social spaces. Stay connected in the way that feels most comfortable and know that we're all in this together.
3. **Communicate.** If you're worried about your student or yourself, reach out. There are lots of resources available, including parent stress lines, zoom telehealth sessions and email. Reach out to teachers, reach out to others at school, reach out to your own doctor if needed. Physical and mental health are top priority right now – not only for students, but for the parents and guardians who love them.
4. **Find the humor/laughter in the day.** If you are not funny by nature – and for some very serious people humor is just not their thing -- it helps to have friends or family who are. People who send funny text messages, who laugh with you, who find humor in the absurdity of life, even, are lifesavers. While depression and anxiety can't be cured by a meme or joke, there is plenty of research to suggest that laughter is an amazing coping mechanism, that it lowers stress and that laughter changes body chemistry. Try a few reruns of *The Office* or watch videos of babies laughing – whatever it takes!
5. **Pace yourself.** As we keep hearing, this is a marathon, not a sprint. We don't have all the answers yet and we don't know how this all plays out. Look for small victories each day and celebrate moments that feel great to you. We'll get there, and we'll do it a step at a time. We are all walking this path together – albeit 6 feet apart – toward a common goal of engaging our kids in school, working together as a community and leading with both head and heart on this journey. We've got each other – parents, teachers, students, all of us. We've got each other.

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