



PANDEMIC SURVIVAL GUIDE *for the* Emotionally Neglected

**How to survive and thrive in the new normal
when you have Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN**

Dr. Jonice Webb



What is Childhood Emotional Neglect?™

Most people realize that what happens to you in childhood has an effect on who you become as an adult. The good and the bad: happy times and accomplishments, as well as mistreatment or abuse. It all has an impact.

But there is another factor from childhood that can have an equal or even greater effect than childhood events, like happy family trips or painful incidents. It's a factor that you likely can't see or remember. It's often invisible. I call it **Childhood Emotional Neglect** or **CEN**.

Childhood Emotional Neglect happens when your parents fail to respond *enough* to your emotional needs.

Childhood Emotional Neglect is, in some ways, the opposite of mistreatment and abuse. Whereas mistreatment and abuse are parental acts, Childhood Emotional Neglect is a parent's *failure to act*. It's a failure to notice, validate, or respond appropriately to your feelings.

Because it's an act of omission, Childhood Emotional Neglect is usually not visible, noticeable or memorable. It's the white space in your family picture; the background rather than the foreground. It is insidious and overlooked while it does its silent damage to your life.

Children who are emotionally neglected grow up to have a particular set of struggles. If your emotions were not validated as a child, you may have difficulty knowing and trusting your own emotions as an adult. You may have difficulty understanding your own feelings, as well as the feelings of others.

Because an important part of yourself (your emotional self) has been denied, you may find yourself feeling disconnected, unfulfilled, or empty. You may find it hard to rely on others. You may feel, deep down, that you are different from other people; like something is wrong with you, but you're not sure what it is.

Another way that parents can unwittingly emotionally neglect you is to fail to give you the structure and rules to live by, like consequences and discipline. As a result, you are set up to struggle with self-discipline as an adult.

Whatever the level of parental failure, you may have few childhood memories to explain your difficulties. So, too often, you blame yourself for not being happier.

To this day, Childhood Emotional Neglect has been overlooked. Because it's invisible, unmemorable, and the absence of something (emotional validation), it has been greatly overshadowed by more visible, but also worthy topics, like adverse childhood events, abuse, or trauma.

My goal is to shine a light on this powerful but invisible force. To give all people a common language to talk about it, and to offer an explanation to you, and to the scores of people who are suffering in silence, wondering what is wrong.

Dr. Jonica Webb

The Pandemic and Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN)

Whatever negative events you may have imagined happening in your future, the coronavirus pandemic was probably not one of them.

It seems that the current state of our world, replete as it is with quarantines, stay-at-home orders, closed businesses, virtual education, lost projects, and social distancing leaves probably about 90% or more people feeling alone, uncertain and lost.

As a psychologist who specializes in the effects of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN on adults, I can tell you that scores of people had already brought a big dose of those three feelings forward from their childhoods and have been quietly coping with them for years.

And now, in this current situation, we are handed an extra measure of “alone, uncertain, and lost,” plus a whole lot more.

If you grew up in a family that ignored the emotions of its members (CEN); if you are stuck at home, feeling stressed, lost, confused, terrified, alone, helpless or hopeless, sad, worried, or angry, I want you to know that there is a way to turn this around for yourself.

The Importance of Control in an Uncontrollable Time

Much of this situation is truly out of your control, but not all of it. It is possible to reframe your current situation into an opportunity. An opportunity to do things you were never able to do because of time, stress, and all the life demands that you’ve always been juggling.

I believe you can survive the challenges of this pandemic. But I want you to do better than survive. I want you to find yourself growing in surprising ways during the pandemic. I want you to thrive.

So I have put together this guide to help you cope and grow in the various areas of your life that are being challenged the most by the current state of our world. In this Guide you will find understanding, awareness, help, and support, as well as concrete steps you can take to care for yourself during COVID-19.

Six Areas of Life Most Affected by the Pandemic

1. Emotional Self-Care

2. Emotional Growth

3. Sleep

4. Your Children

5. Your Parents

6. Pandemic-Induced Guilt



Area 1: Emotional Self-Care

Five Emotional Precautions to Take During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Obsessed with the coronavirus? I know you are because we all are.

We become obsessed with things that are out of our control. It's because our brains must work overtime to process the incredible changes we are experiencing.

As a result, it can be hard to get ourselves to think about anything other than the news as this historic event unfolds.

When will we have a successful vaccine? How do you make good choices for yourself and others? What will be the economic fallout? These issues and more are all on our minds, for sure.

Five Big Challenges of Getting Through This Global Pandemic

1. **The suddenness of it:** You may have heard of the virus spreading overseas a few weeks ago, but it seemed very far removed at that time. Then, seemingly quite suddenly, it's here. In fact, it's not only here, but it is affecting you. The world has come to a screeching stop.
2. **Powerlessness:** Human beings are notoriously bad about dealing with things that are out of our control. In many ways, we all find ourselves standing by and watching the virus infect more people. There is little we can do and it is hard.

3. **Constant news:** Every day we wake up to more bad news for us to consume. Then, it continues all day; more news coming in about how the virus is spreading, how poorly people are responding to calls to stay home to prevent the virus spread, and much, much more. It is easy to become obsessed and overwhelmed with all this information.
4. **Social isolation:** Let's face it, we're all lonely. Trapped in our homes, there is little to do but wait.
5. **Reality-based fear:** Most likely you are worried about your own personal finances. Whether you are laid off, facing a lay-off, concerned about the value of your home, or concerned about meeting your bills, we all watch as the global economy suffers. We worry about our future. It's normal.

As the world closes down around us, and as life as we've known it comes to a halt, we must cope.

We have been educated about a number of physical precautions to take: 6' social distance, stay at home, hand washing, and more. But in an event this extensive and impactful, it's not just your physical health at stake. It's imperative to watch out for your emotional health too. There are some things we should all be aware of. It's important.

Three Reasons it's Important to Take Emotional Precautions

1. Your emotional and psychological state have a powerful impact on your immunity. It is vital to take special care of it.
2. You may be closed up in a house with your family or roommate. They are affected by your emotional state and their immunity can also be affected by your emotional health.
3. Taking emotional precautions will help you make better decisions through these frightening, challenging, nebulous times.

Five Emotional Precautions You Should Take During the Global Pandemic

1. **Pay attention to your feelings and allow yourself to feel them:** Some of us are more likely than others to fail at this one. We march through all of the sudden changes and anxiety without ever paying attention to how we are actually feeling about it. If you grew up in a family that was blind to emotions (Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN) you are probably now blind to your own emotions. But in this situation, it is important to pause, focus on your feelings, and identify them. Are you feeling frightened? Concerned? Sad? Disappointed? Lost? Alone? Fearful? Helpless? Hopeless? It might be anything. But it's important for you to know, and it will help you feel better to know.
2. **Help yourself feel less powerless by doing what you can:** Follow the recommendations for social distancing. Use your good judgment balancing self-care and care for others. Offer assistance for those around you who need it. Support others and look for support when you need it.
3. **Limit your news consumption to certain times of day:** Reading every news notification that comes in all day long will consume you and alter your brain chemicals. You can set some healthy limits for yourself! For example, read the news first thing in the morning; then don't read it again until the next morning. Do not worry, the news will wait for you.
4. **Use the phone, Skype, and FaceTime to connect with loved ones:** During these lonely times, it is extra crucial to reach out. Check in with people. Call someone and say, "I'm lonely. Want to chat?" Most likely that person is lonely too.

5. Use this opportunity to grow in some way:

Perhaps you can reframe this situation from “global pandemic” to “opportunity.” It’s a chance to tune in and pay attention to yourself because, in a way, external distractions are minimized. Choose a way you’ve been wanting to improve yourself and go with it.

Ignoring what you’re feeling allows your neglected emotions to become stronger. Those ignored feelings can cause headaches, backaches, multiple other physical problems but, most importantly right now, they can lower your immunity.

Did you grow up in a family that did not “do feelings?” Were few feeling words used in your

childhood home? Do you fail to pay attention to your emotions on a day to day basis now? These are all signs of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN.

If your answer to any of those questions is, “Maybe,” then I have a great suggestion for you. Use any extra time you have right now to reflect on whether you missed out on learning some emotion skills while you were growing up.

Then take all that energy you’ve been putting into worrying and apply it to addressing your emotional reactions to your current life events. This way, you can not only stop draining yourself, but also use your feelings as the source of energy, motivation, connection and direction that they are meant to be.

*I cannot stress this enough:
If you are accustomed to
ignoring your feelings,
you are now at risk.*



Area 2: Emotional Growth

The Pandemic is Shining a Spotlight on Your Personal Issues. What Will You Do?

Recently, I sent an email to my newsletter subscribers asking them to share with me the biggest emotional hurdles they are facing during the COVID-19 crisis. The response was incredible! In fact, I received so many heartfelt emails that one day later I got a warning from my email provider that my account was about to crash.

As I read through the many hundreds and hundreds of responses, I realized something very important. It is this:

Whatever was not going right in your life emotionally before the pandemic is probably being magnified and showcased for you right now.

This pandemic is shining a spotlight on our inner selves. Your eyes can now see, in high-def living color, what's been missing, what's been disjointed, what's been problematic in your life, maybe even for a long time. At the end of this article, I will describe what sheltering-in-place forced me to look at in my own life.

But first, let's talk about you. How will you respond to the spotlight? Will you look away? Or will you seize this moment? *What will you do?*

The Spotlight

Think about it. You may have spent months or years wishing you had more time with your spouse. You may have worried about your children. Perhaps you have longed to step off the hamster wheel that is your life to take a rest. Or maybe you have felt lonely, or sad, or anxious, but weren't sure what to do about it.

Or your life issue could be something completely different from any of those. But, no matter what, whether you are feeling better or worse as this epidemic drags on, you are likely receiving some messages from your body that you never would have noticed before.

What do I mean by messages from your body? I'm talking about emotions.

Right here, right now, I want to help you not only become aware of the messages your body is sending you in real-time. I also want to help you understand those messages and why you are receiving them.

Whatever you are feeling right now while sheltering in place during the pandemic may be simply a direct result of the situation which will resolve itself once the pandemic ends. Or, another possibility is that you are feeling something that has been coming and going often before the pandemic hit.

Now, with the onslaught of the outside world held at bay, we are being forced to sit with ourselves. You may be feeling an emotion that you've been avoiding for months or years or even decades.

If this is the case, then you are being presented with a useful gift. And I'm going to help you seize the moment, and potentially change your life in a very good and lasting way.

Three Ways the Pandemic Shines a Light on Your Issues

1. Being locked away with your closest people highlights whatever problems exist in your relationships with those people. For example, have you been angry with your spouse for a long time? You're likely to notice it more now.
2. Being prevented from engaging in your external life makes you either miss it or be happy to be away from it. Which is it for you? What does this say about how you have been living your life?
3. Having far fewer external distractions leaves you sitting with your inner self. Your body may have been trying to send you messages for some time (maybe even years) and you have been too busy, too distracted, too externally focused, or too tired to notice. Now you can pay attention. What are they? What do they mean?

Follow These Five Steps to Identify What You are Feeling During the Pandemic

1. Sit for a few minutes with your eyes closed.
2. Take three deep breaths. As you do, focus your attention on your chest and belly as they move in and out with the intake and release of air.
3. Now, while breathing normally, keep your focus on the physical sensations in your body. What are you feeling? Search for any of the feelings above or something else.
4. Do not get frustrated with yourself. Whatever you are feeling or not feeling, it is absolutely okay. How do I know this? Because you cannot choose what you feel or don't feel. So all feelings, by their very nature, are okay.
5. If you do identify one or more feelings, think about whether each feeling is a simple response to the pandemic, a response to being cut off from your normal life, or an actual reflection of how you feel about your normal life.

Examples of Common Feelings Expressed During the Pandemic by My Email Subscribers

- Alone
- Lost
- Restless or Anxious
- Foreboding
- Angry
- Helpless
- Afraid
- Bored
- Empty
- Sad
- Overwhelmed
- Grateful
- Relaxed
- Relieved
- Loved/Loving
- Safe
- Disappointed
- Insecure
- Concerned

Helpful Resource: Use the exhaustive list of emotion words in the back of the book *Running On Empty: Overcome Your Childhood Emotional Neglect* to help you name whatever you are feeling.

Now Follow These Five Steps

1. Sit for a few minutes with your eyes closed.
2. Take three deep breaths. As you do, focus your attention on your chest and belly as they move in and out with the intake and release of air.
3. Now, while breathing normally, keep your focus on the physical sensations in your body. What are you feeling? Search for any of the feelings above or something else.
4. Do not get frustrated with yourself. Whatever you are feeling or not feeling, it is absolutely okay. How do I know this? Because you cannot choose what you feel or don't feel. So all feelings, by their very nature, are okay.
5. If you do identify one or more feelings, think about whether each feeling is a simple response to the pandemic, a response to being cut off from your normal life, or an actual reflection of how you feel about your normal life.

Examples of How to Use the Spotlight and Apply it to Your Life

AARON

Sheltering in place with three teenagers and his wife of 13 years, Aaron is aware that he has a problem. Something is just not right, but he's not sure what it is. After reading through the Feelings list, he does the above exercise to identify what he is feeling. He comes up with "Alone."

Why would I feel alone? I'm here with my wife and kids, spending more time with them than ever before. In consideration of #5 above, Aaron realizes that he has felt alone in his marriage for a long time. He decides that he needs to talk with his wife about this.

JACKIE

Jackie lives alone and is sheltering in place all by herself. She knows she is lonely and that it's a natural response to the situation but she also has moments of deep discomfort that have been bothering her. Using the steps and questions above, Jackie puts the word "foreboding" on her feeling.

Why would I feel a sense of foreboding right now? By tuning in to her feelings and considering their source, Jackie recognizes that she has been carrying this feeling with her for months before the pandemic ever hit. Sorting it through, she discerns that this feeling of foreboding is about her self-care and health. Her body has been trying to warn her that working constantly with zero thought to her physical needs was going to harm her own health and happiness.

Jackie realizes that once she returns to her regular work life, she must do some things differently. She must carve out some time for herself, make an effort to meet her own needs for rest, free time, diet and exercise.

MYSELF

As I began sheltering in place, I noticed a quite familiar but troublesome feeling in my stomach. It was happening more than ever before, to the point that it was hard to ignore. After some focusing and consideration, I put the words "unsettled, uneasy, and lost," all at the same time.

When I began to pay more attention, I noticed that I had this feeling at times when there was nothing obvious that I needed to do at that moment, when I had the luxury of making a decision about what to do. Having more of these moments was making me very uncomfortable. My body was telling me that I needed to be pulled six different ways and doing twelve different things in order to be calm.

So I decided to consciously address this. I downloaded a new Kindle book and identified some other things I enjoy doing but never have the time for. Now, when I have that feeling, I take a deep breath and consciously choose one of my new endeavors. That feeling always goes away.

The spotlight of this pandemic has taught me that whenever life does go back to normal, I need to make sure that I have more of these moments of conscious choice and leisure.

The Takeaway ...

Most people spend much of their lives running away from their feelings. Yet they offer us one of the greatest sources of guidance, energy, direction and meaning that is available to us in our lives.

Right now, what seems like a disaster is also an opportunity. With the world on Pause and a spotlight shining on your problems, *what will you do?*

Will you look away and continue to avoid it? Or will your gaze follow the light? Will you look directly at the problem, define it, and declare, **“Challenge accepted.”**

Small but Substantial Ways You Can Use Covid-19 Isolation to Emotionally Grow

COVID-19 has set the entire world back in many significant ways. I don't need to list the ways it has changed our lives because we are all living through it.

When life throws unexpected changes at you, you will naturally be thrown off your game. If you are the sort of person who tends to ignore your own feelings and needs, you may be thrown off your game even more than most.

That's why those with Childhood Emotional Neglect are finding themselves feeling somewhat lost and confused right now, strugg-

ling with self-discipline, and trying to find some guidance to get back on track.

The ideas I'm going to offer below will do just that for you. Some may not seem psychological, but believe me, they are. Each has the potential to greatly impact your emotional health now, and also continue once this pandemic eases up. On top of that, they will even return you to your regular life as an improved version of your current self.

Twenty Ideas to Help You Survive & Thrive Through the Epidemic

1. **Declutter your house.** Is your clutter getting out of control because of your busy life? Use this time to get organized. Go through the papers and unnecessary objects in your house and sort it and get rid of some detritus. It will feel so good. It's you taking control in an uncontrollable situation.
2. **Learn a new language.** It has so many benefits. It not only improves your brain, but it also connects you to a different culture and that is a good thing in today's world.
3. **Write.** Writing, no matter what kind you do taps into an expressive, thoughtful part of your inner self. Have you had an idea for a novel or a memoir? Is there a part of your life that you would like to remember? Some unprocessed painful memory? Write about it.
4. **Clean the small spaces in your home.** You know those little corners behind furniture, under furniture, window sills or the tops of windows and doors? Now is a great chance to attack those. You'll feel so good about it.
5. **Improve your cooking.** Cooking is a form of creativity and it's also a way to practice self-care.
6. **Explore new music.** It's easy to fall into a rut of listening to the same artists or styles over and over. Get yourself out of it and try something new.

7. **Sharpen a music interest or talent.** Always wanted to learn the guitar or how to sing in tune? Now's your time.
8. **Improve your relationship with an important person.** This might be anyone who you've always wanted to have a better relationship with. Amazing progress can be made when you have the time and energy to focus on it.
9. **Become more familiar with your emotions.** This would benefit almost every human alive today. Why? Because your feelings are amazing tools that you could be harnessing better than you probably are to assist you in self-knowledge, self-expression, and decision-making. This is also one of the steps of healing Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN.
10. **Practice and learn meditation and mindfulness.** This will help you find your center better and control your own brain, both of which are helpful when dealing with stressful situations.
11. **Make a list of the strengths that got you through previous life setbacks.** I know you have some. Being aware of them allows you to consciously call upon them when you need them.
12. **Be grateful every morning when you wake up healthy and alive.** Be grateful for the lives and health of your loved ones. Gratitude has been found to be a major contributor to life happiness. No matter what is going on around you, there are, without a doubt, some genuine things you should still be thankful for.
13. **Think of a goal that's achievable now that could not have occurred to you in the pre-COVID world.** This might be anything positive and healthy.
14. **Reach out to someone you cared about before but lost track of due to hectic life.** An old childhood friend, a cousin, aunt or uncle, or a college buddy. Reconnection is enriching and enlivening.
15. **Practice or learn a new skill that applies to your career.** Take an online course or read a book. Or simply practice what you already know to get better at it.
16. **Choose an intimidating exercise you can do at home and do it every day.** For example, 10 push-ups or pull-ups/day. Tailor it to your own body and abilities.
17. **Give.** Find a way to help in person or online and offer to help them. Like gratitude, research shows that helping others makes a person happier.
18. **Let your mind wander.** There is a great shortage of this simple pleasure in today's world. Just sit. Ponder. Let your mind go. It's good for you, I promise.
19. **Read a challenging book.** This could be any book you've wanted to read but haven't had the time or energy for.
20. **Reach out to someone you wronged in the past and apologize.** Virtually everyone has a nagging sense of guilt about having behaved in some negative or harmful way in the past, even if unintentional. This is your opportunity to wipe your guilt away by offering an explanation or apology. Or, if you cannot reach out to the person, think it through, learn a lesson from it, and put it behind you.

The way you are feeling now as an adult mimics, in many ways, the feelings of an emotionally neglected child. Feeling lost, alone and uncertain, you wonder what comes next.

But now you know that the answer to that is in large part up to you. You can use this painful time to improve yourself and become stronger for whatever your future holds.

What feeds your self-respect, self-like and self-love more than watching yourself take the lemons the world is handing you and turn them into lemonade?

There is no stronger sign of emotional health than resilience. And growing yourself in any one of these impactful ways during a global crisis rife with setbacks is definitely a sign of just that.



Area 3: Sleep

Are You Having Sleep Problems During the Pandemic? Five Likely Reasons

As a psychologist and as a human being, I am receiving this message from every direction and all sides. It's rampant these days.

People are having a hard time sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some people lie awake unable to fall asleep. Some wake up in the middle of the night and their brain starts racing. Other folks say they wake up in the early morning hours and lie awake for a long time before the alarm goes off.

Then there are the ones whose sleep pattern has been thrown totally off. They're awake when they should be sleeping and sleeping when they should be awake. What is it about this pandemic that is making a good night's sleep so hard for so many people?

In talking with many people about their sleep problems during the pandemic, particular struggles have emerged as common patterns. So, I think I have some answers that I'm going to share with you today.

First, let's review the primary causes of the problems. They will probably not all apply to you but, in reality, all it takes is one.

Five Common Causes of Sleep Problems During the Pandemic

1. **Loss of some of the structure you had in your pre-COVID life.** Perhaps you no longer need to get up as early, scramble around as much, commute, or handle as many required deadlines or demands as you did before.

Requirements placed on us from the outside, by people and our jobs, for example, force us to form and follow a regular pattern or routine. When we lose some of the external demands, we can lose track of our routine. Our regular, healthy habits, like eating, showering, and exercising that we have developed to manage and cope may fly out the window. ***The Feelings Keeping You Awake: Lost, unmoored, uprooted, out of control of yourself.***

2. **Anxiety and fear of the unknown.** Let's face it, we all have some of this. Will you or someone you love get sick? Will you lose someone? Will the economy recover? Will you ever get your job back? Will you survive financially? Depending on where you live, you may be on lockdown or transitioning out or out, but nothing is ever really permanent. The lack of answers and certainty makes it hard to shut your mind down. You may lay awake processing these questions at night. ***The Feelings Keeping You Awake: Fear, trepidation, uncertainty, anxiety.***
3. **Losses.** Let's think for a minute about what you have lost. Have you lost income? Social plans? Projects? Have you lost people, the greatest loss of all? Have you lost your job, your prospects, your hopes for your children or yourself? We have all lost something. ***The Feelings Keeping You Awake: Grief, loss, longing.***
4. **Reduced stimulation.** Were you busy, running around a lot, pre-COVID? Seeing people, working hard, recreating, doing things, going to the gym, going to the movies, the theater, stores, or friends' houses? All of these things stimulate your brain and body. Back then, there was motion, color, activity, and challenge to your days that you may be missing now. All those things were tiring out your brain and body. You were burning energy all day long.

What about now? Your unburned energy may be powering you at night. ***The Feelings Keeping You Awake: Restless, antsy, jumpy.***

5. **Lack of human connection.** As a psychologist, I know from talking with many people that feelings of disconnection and loneliness are an epidemic of their own right now. So, ironically, if you are feeling alone, you are not alone. This is a feeling that can get under your skin and trouble you deeply from the inside, keeping you awake at night. ***The Feelings Keeping You Awake: Alone, disconnected, lost, at sea, vulnerable.***

So What About These Feelings That are Keeping You Awake?

I know what you may be thinking, "Why this section about feelings? Just tell me what to do to fix it!" Well, that is exactly what I am doing.

Here's the thing, and believe me, this is important. It may seem like your *thoughts* are keeping you awake at night, but, in reality, it's your *feelings*.

For many problems, but especially in the case of sleep, the feelings are the layer closest to the problem. Your feelings are messages from your body that are meant to be useful and helpful. When you use them properly, they will inform, empower, and motivate you to provide yourself with what you need to be happy and healthy. If you ignore them, they get stronger. Your feelings want to be heard.

Most people, especially if you grew up in a family that didn't acknowledge the power and importance of emotions (an emotionally neglectful family) you probably underestimate the role they play in your own happiness and health on an everyday basis.

So What Do I Do?

Amazing news you may not fully realize. Yes, your feelings are keeping you from sleeping, but they are also an amazing pipeline to the solution!

When you are lying in bed in the dark, there is nothing external stimulating you. So, it is at this particular time that any feelings you've been ignoring will take the opportunity to come to the surface and try to make your brain acknowledge and process them.

So, not surprisingly, the answer is to acknowledge and process them. But not at night, during the day!

If you were emotionally ignored as a child, then you are probably emotionally ignoring yourself today. It is time to stop.

Your body is trying to communicate with your brain at night when you are the most available to hear it (your feelings are the messages). You can make a conscious effort to listen and process them during the day. This will free your brain and body up to get much-needed sleep at night.

How to Process Your Feelings During the Day

1. **Take some time every day to sit quietly and focus your attention inward.** Tune into the sensations in your body and pay attention to how and what you are feeling.
2. **See if you can sit for a few minutes, eyes closed, and feel what you feel.** Sitting with feelings instead of escaping them is a major emotion skill and you are doing it!
3. **Consider the feeling you're having.** Why are you having it? What does it mean? What is your body trying to tell you? Perhaps that you need to provide yourself with structure, make more effort to connect with people, get some exercise, talk to a friend, or grieve?
4. **Feel nothing repeatedly when you try this? This is a sign that your feelings may be walled-off and suppressed (a natural result of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN).** Don't worry, you can still get in touch with the feelings that are keeping you awake and process them. You can break down the wall that's blocking you from your feelings and start learning how to use them.



Area 4: Your Children

How to Use Extra COVID-19 Family Time to Give Your Kids a Leg-Up on Life

One of the most impactful and talked about consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis is that hundreds of thousands of children are spending more time with their siblings and parents. Normally, they would be spending six hours per day at school, but now they are at home.

Whether you are a working parent or not, you are probably stressed out and exhausted. Please know, you have the sympathy of virtually all the people out there who have ever raised kids.

Spending so much time at home is not typical of today's families and it is, without a doubt, a major challenge for all. But I want you to know that this crisis is also an opportunity.

This crisis offers you a chance to give your children an amazing leg-up on life. You can use this extra time to teach your children about emotion.

Having a good understanding of the world of feelings, also known as “emotional intelligence,” has been found by research to be an invaluable life skill, contributing more to happiness and success in adulthood than even general IQ or intellectual intelligence.

Just as important is the fact that, since emotions drive behavior and are the glue of all relationships, responding to your child's emotions truly makes parenting easier. Making the changes we will talk about here can substantially improve your child's behavior as well as their relationship with you.

If you are feeling doubt as you're reading this, I hope you will humor me and try anyway. I believe you will then find out that it is true.

But before we talk about your children or your parenting, we must first spend a few minutes talking about you. Please consider these three questions and do your best to answer them before you read on.

Three Questions About You

1. When you were a child growing up, were your parents emotionally aware? Did they notice what you were feeling, and respond to your feelings by naming them and validating them?
2. When you were a child, did you feel comfortable going to your parents for emotional reassurance, help, and support?
3. As an adult, would you describe yourself as generally aware of what you are feeling and why? Are you good at putting your feelings into words and expressing them? Do your emotions guide your decisions and help you make good ones for yourself? In other words, do you feel that you have good, solid emotional intelligence?

Now, here's something interesting. If you answered "yes" to the first two questions above, chances are very, very high that you also answered "yes" to #3. Why? Because emotionally attuned, emotionally intelligent parents raise emotionally attuned, emotionally intelligent kids. And so on, and so on, emotional intelligence automatically gets passed down as parents naturally and healthfully notice, validate and respond to their children's feelings.

Now, here's something even more interesting. The reverse is also true. If your parents have a blind spot to emotions, they will not "see" or respond to your feelings enough. This will result in you growing up with your own blind spots to emotions. And so on and so on, around and around it goes.

It's called Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN. It silently transfers from one generation to the next, unbeknownst to even loving parents who are trying their best. CEN is rampant in today's world, and it's usually no one's fault. If you suspect that this could be happening in your family, I want you to know that it is not your fault.

It's really not your fault. It just is what it is.

But that is not the end of the story. You have a wonderful opportunity right now to reverse the CEN that has been passed down to you. You can stop the cycle. By doing 5 small steps, you can use this time on lockdown to teach the foundational skills of emotional intelligence to your children.

How to Teach Your Kids About Emotions

1. If you are not sure about your answers to the three questions above, take the Emotional Neglect Questionnaire. You can find the link below in the Bio (it's free). Scoring high on the ENQ is an indication that you grew up with some Emotional Neglect and did not have the opportunity to learn the skills that make up emotional intelligence.
2. Read through the list of emotion words to increase your vocabulary. You can find this list in its complete form in the back of the book, *Running On Empty: Overcome Your Childhood Emotional Neglect*, but you can also download a free version on my website, EmotionalNeglect.com. This will prepare you to do step 3, next.
3. Pay attention to what your child is feeling. Regardless of the age of your child, it is natural to focus mostly on how your child acts and what your child does. Now, make a special effort to identify what he/she feels. This is extremely helpful because actions and behaviors are driven by feelings. So addressing your child's feelings is the best way to affect their behavior.
4. Begin to try to name what you perceive your child feeling while they are feeling it. Check with them to see if your perception is right.
5. Validate your child's feelings when you see them. This means letting your child know that it's OK what they are feeling and that their feelings are understandable, even if you

disagree with them. Remember that your children cannot choose their feelings.

- *You seem sad. What's going on?*
- *You're angry, right? And I can understand why you would be.*
- *You just said that with a wistful tone.*
- *If I were you, I'd feel really let down right now. Is that what you're feeling?*

By following these five steps, you can teach your children that their feelings are real, that they make sense, and that they matter. This will lay the foundation for your child's emotional intelligence.

And Now Back to You Again

And now, I want to point out that there is a child inside of you who went through childhood with their feelings under-noticed, under-named, and under-validated.

This launched you into adulthood lacking crucial emotion skills. So I ask you to do one more important task.

I would like you to re-read Steps 1 through 5 but replace "your child" with "you." The more you can pay attention to your own feelings, name them, and validate them the better you will be able to do this for your children.

Childhood Emotional Neglect probably started long before your great-great-grandparents. Emotional intelligence, however, starts with you.

Perhaps you can create some silver lining out of the hardship of this pandemic.

Putting words to your feelings and the feelings of your children, noticing them, and accepting them as valid is the beginning of a new life for yourself and your kids.

use this extra family time to reverse generations of emotional emptiness and eventually launch your kids into adulthood with the opposite of what you grew up with: emotional attunement, emotional validation, emotional recognition, *emotional intelligence.*



Area 5: Your Parents

Eight Ways COVID-19 is Affecting Adults' Relationships with Their Parents

COVID-19 is affecting many people in many different ways. But one effect that is shared by most, perhaps virtually all, of us these days is that COVID-19 is making us feel more vulnerable.

Exactly what do I mean by vulnerable? I mean many different flavors of vulnerable feelings.

In this unprecedented time, you may be feeling more physically, socially, and emotionally vulnerable than usual and perhaps more so than ever before in your life.

You may feel physically vulnerable due to the risk of getting sick.

You may feel socially vulnerable due to being cut off or distanced from your family and friends.

And you may be feeling emotionally vulnerable, a product of both of the factors above. On top of that, most of us are spending more time alone with fewer distractions. The pandemic, with its social distancing, requires you to sit with yourself more, so it's difficult to escape your feelings, anxieties, doubts, and fears. And they may be many.

Your Relationships

As COVID-19 drags on, the world awaiting a vaccine, many relationships have been affected. Some have been enlivened or deepened or enriched. Marriages, friendships, and families have become closer, more mutually dependent, and more supportive.

Other relationships have been strained by the present situation we are in. They have been challenged, weakened, frustrated, broken, or pained.

As someone who hears from hundreds of people every week who are doing their best to cope with the pandemic, one of the relationship types that I have noticed taking a lot of boosts, as well as hits, are the relationships between adults and their parents.

Whatever your situation with your parents, the pandemic may be complicating it. Your parents may live nearby or far away. You may have had issues with your parents before COVID-19. Your parents may be healthy emotionally and physically or they may be elderly and frail. They may be living in a facility.

Whatever the circumstances, I believe that millions of people are feeling extra vulnerable right now and are finding themselves struggling with their parents in some new way. And it is all due to circumstances that are completely out of their control.

Eight Ways COVID-19 is Affecting Adults' Relationships with Their Parents

- 1. You may feel a need to reconnect.** As you live your life, you may have become somewhat distant from your parents. Whether that was intentional or unintentional, you may find yourself feeling a longing to be more in touch with them.
- 2. You may worry about their physical and mental health.** The Pandemic may be making it hard for you to communicate with or see your parents. You may feel less able to be involved in their choices or care.
- 3. You may feel helpless in the face of your parents' level of precautions.** This is a common concern, as many elders are ignoring precautions and may be taking risks with their own health. You may be sitting by watching and that is very hard.
- 4. You may feel more in need of validation.** All human beings need to feel seen and known and loved by their parents. We need to hear certain things from our parents that assure us that our feelings and needs matter. If we don't receive enough of that in our childhoods (Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN), our brains automatically continue to seek it as adults. To need this from your parents is not a sign of weakness, but of your humanity. Feeling vulnerable right now in general may make you need this validation from your parents even more. It's painful.
- 5. You may feel afraid of losing them.** Will your parents get COVID? You may find yourself worrying about or imagining how you would feel if you lost them.
- 6. You may find yourself appreciating them more.** There's nothing like a fear of loss to make you more appreciative. You may be feeling more love, more warmth, or gratefulness for what your parents have done for you.
- 7. You may experience them as needy.** Are your parents calling you more often, asking you for help or advice or support? Do they need to connect with you more often than has been typical of them? This is likely because they are feeling vulnerable or worrying about you.
- 8. Family dynamics may be intensified.** Not surprisingly, stress aggravates previously existing problems of all kinds. So, in many families, old anger or frustration or resentment has been fomenting and increasing under the powerful pressure and strain of COVID-19.

The Role of Childhood Emotional Neglect

If you grew up in an emotionally unavailable (CEN) family, you may be experiencing several of the effects above. You may feel a longing to

receive the ingredients that were missing from your childhood, while also feeling distant and helpless and disappointed in your parents.

When you do not receive enough emotional attention, empathy, meaningful conversation, or validation from your parents as a child, (Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN) you are naturally, as an adult, continually driven back to try to capture it. But your CEN parents may simply not have it to give, and this compounds your pain.

Three Ways to Cope

1. **Put yourself first.** Your parents are important people, of course, but your primary responsibility in life is to yourself. So be sure to prioritize your own needs during this stressful time. Your physical, mental and emotional needs must be addressed before you can give to others, even your parents.

2. **Try to accept what you cannot change.**

This wise principle is one of the tenets of 12-Step Programs and it applies here. You do not have control over your parents and you cannot change their choices. You also cannot get from your parents what that they do not have to give, like emotional validation, empathy, or connection. Accepting

your powerlessness in this relationship can be quite painful, but it does protect you from the wheel-spinning and frustration of continually going back to an empty well, looking for the emotional connection that never appears.

3. **Take note of what your feelings are telling you.** Your feelings are communications from your body. Every feeling carries a specific message. For example, the feeling of longing drives you to contact them more, whereas anger/frustration tells you to take protective action. Your feelings are trying to guide you, but there is a second question to ask yourself: Is this feeling telling me to do something healthy for me or something that may be unhealthy or damaging? It is important to notice and listen to your feelings, but it's important to process them first. Sometimes, it can help to run this by someone you trust to gain a more objective opinion of what is healthy for you.

Most likely, this pandemic is affecting many of your relationships for better or for worse. The one thing you can do right now that will make you stronger in every area of your life: nurture yourself, care for yourself, and pay attention to what you are feeling.

When you feel vulnerable,
treat yourself as if
you are your own number one.
Because you are.



Area 6: Pandemic-Induced Guilt

Seven Reasons Some People Actually Feel Better and Happier During the Pandemic

As most folks struggle and stress to get through this messy mishmash we call “pandemic,” there is a certain group of people who are living a whole different sort of life.

These folks are actually doing the opposite of struggling and stressing. There is, in fact, something about the current situation that makes them feel better in some deep and important way.

Some feel more grounded, some feel more focused, and some more valid than they always have. Some feel less alone, less lost, or less insecure than they have throughout their adult lives.

I know what you may be thinking: How could this be? Are these people selfish or self-centered or taking delight in other people’s struggle and worry and pain?

Absolutely, positively not.

In fact, most of the folks who are feeling better right now are genuinely caring people who, if anything, tend to over-focus on other people’s needs at the expense of their own.

Let’s take a look at the variables that explain all of this.

Seven Reasons Some People Feel Better and Happier During the Epidemic

1. **Folks with Chronic FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)** — These are the people who walk through their lives feeling like they are somehow on the outside of things. They look around and see other people laughing and enjoying life. To these folks, it always seems that other people are living more exciting and happy lives. So finally, now, with almost the entire population trapped at home, it’s

easier to relax in the knowledge that they aren't missing anything.

2. Those Who Have Always Felt Alone in the World

— If, as a child, you did not receive enough emotional support from your parents, you are likely to go through your adult life feeling somewhat alone in the world. Perhaps you have felt alone for so long that it has become comfortably uncomfortable. Perhaps, in this global crisis, you really are alone. Perhaps you are able to tolerate being alone far better than others. Perhaps, finally, your real life on the outside mirrors what you've always felt on the inside and it is, on some level, validating.

3. People Whose Specific Childhood Challenges Prepared Them

— If your childhood was unpredictable, was filled with uncertainty, or required you to make decisions you weren't prepared for or act beyond your years, then perhaps your childhood prepared you for this very moment. When you grow up this way you develop some special skills out of necessity. You learn how to hyper-focus in ambiguous situations and how to act decisively and trust yourself. Since you have a solid foundation of the exact skills needed for the pandemic, you may be feeling more focused and confident right now than you have in years.

4. People Who Feel Numb Unless Something Extreme is Happening

— If you wouldn't describe yourself as an emotional person, or if you find yourself feeling nothing when you know you should be feeling something, you may find yourself having some real emotions as this COVID-19 pandemic unfolds. Scores of people need a novel or extreme situation to feel something. Some engage in dangerous, unpredictable, or thrill-seeking activities in order to feel. Today, the danger,

unpredictability, and thrills have come to them. Finally, they are having feelings, and any feelings, even negative ones, are better than numbness.

5. Extreme Introverts — If you're a severe homebody who gets tired of being required to go out into the world and mix with people more than is comfortable for you, this may be your respite. Finally, instead of having to adjust to everyone else, everyone else is adjusting to you. There's a new normal afoot, and it is you! What a nice feeling, at last.

6. Those Already Struggling With Significant Life Challenges Before the Pandemic

— Some people were already dealing with some major life crises or challenges before this epidemic hit. For them, this situation may feel like somewhat of a relief. Suddenly, with the world shut down, it's not possible to struggle or solve. As a result, this situation may offer you a bit of a rest. And you're also seeing everyone else struggling, which may feel comforting in a certain way. It's not that you want other people to have problems; it just feels soothing that you are no longer alone. Everyone else is having problems too.

7. Anxious Worriers Who Have Spent Years Anticipating Disaster

— Anxiety can drive people to have a grave fear of being blindsided by an unexpected, painful experience. So some people constantly anticipate what might go wrong as a way to prevent themselves from any sudden, negative shock. Now, here we are. That long-anticipated, long-prepared-for event has happened. These folks are feeling relieved that what they've been vigilantly watching out for their entire lives is finally here. Instead of feeling shocked, they feel relieved.

What This All Means

If any single one of the above applies to you, even in some small way, it's possible that you may have some feelings of guilt about it. You may be concerned that it's wrong to feel better at a time like this.

I want to assure you that it is not! Since we cannot choose our feelings, you should never judge yourself for having a feeling. But it is your responsibility to use your emotions in a healthy way. More about that in a moment. But first...

If any of the first four apply to you, if you are prone to FOMO, a feeling of aloneness, were prepared for this pandemic by your childhood, or live with a numb or empty feeling, you may want to consider the possibility that you grew

up with some amount of *Childhood Emotional Neglect* or *CEN*. CEN can be quite difficult to see or remember, yet it leaves you with these very specific burdens to carry through your adult life. And one very good thing about CEN is that once you know about it, you can heal it!

Now, about how you can use your preparedness and your positive feelings in a good way right now. You likely have more time, and you may be feeling some relief. This is your opportunity to work on understanding yourself better, owning your childhood challenges—which perhaps also made you stronger—and accepting your feelings instead of judging yourself for having them.

It's a tough time and, in ways we never
imagined, we are all in this together.
But, in another way,
we are also each in it alone.
What a marvelous twist it can be if you
use this terrible time to *heal yourself*.