

10 CREATIVE WAYS to ENGAGE CHILDREN and YOUTH THROUGH VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES

Children and youth need our support now more than ever — their world has been turned upside down. More than providing structure, school, sports, dance, theatre, art, and other activities provide our children and youth with a way to express themselves, build competencies, experience belonging, know or feel self-esteem, and find their purpose. Extended family members and friends offer our children and youth a sense of community — where they can see and learn how much they matter and belong. Figuring out how to replicate these experiences and conditions under current distancing constraints of COVID-19 can be challenging. Below are 10 suggestions for anyone involved in the life of a child or youth to nurture relationships with them, help them with stress relief, and uplift them. The suggestions below may have the added benefit of giving parents a break from 24/7 parenting. Child welfare workers as well as other child and youth serving professionals may use these tips to explore how children are doing, and to identify protective factors or signs of danger and concern. They can also be used by families to keep tempers from flaring, promote fun, and reduce boredom.

1. Send kids on a *scavenger hunt* while you check in with parents. Ask them to find things in the house that are the colors of the rainbow — Roy G. Biv. Have them arrange everything they found into a picture or a sculpture for you to see when you are finished with your call. Have siblings work as a team, and encourage older siblings to help the younger ones.

2. Play *virtual hide and seek*. Close your eyes, count to ten and have the young person hide the phone somewhere in the house with the video camera on and facing up. Make sure the young person is in the room where they've hidden the phone, and then you guess the room and place where the phone has been hidden.



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3. Offer to *read a book* to infants and/or children (choose the book according to stage of development). Have parents hold infants and young children in their laps while you read them a story. For older kids, choose a chapter book that you can return to every time you check in.

4. Ask children and youth to make a *dream map*. Have them draw a big circle on a piece of paper. Inside the circle have them write down all the things they want to happen, such as wishes and goals. On the outside of the circle have them write down all the things they don't want to happen. Ask them to decorate it while you are talking to their parent(s) and explore it with them at the end of your call. Let them know they can use it when they are sad, scared, mad, or worried by focusing on all the things that are inside the circle and keep the things on the outside of the circle out of their mind. Have them hang the dream map up in their home somewhere.

5. Invite young children to lie down somewhere comfortable, close their eyes and *count silently* in their heads, as far as they can go (up to 100) and then tell you how far they got. Tell them to do this as many times as they need to before they go to sleep to help them be calm and peaceful. Invite them to do it when they are worried or scared. For older kids (4th grade and up) have them count backwards from 100 down to 0.

6. Have young people gather as many socks as possible and twist or roll them into balls. Then ask them to sit comfortably on the floor in front of the pile of socks and focus on an object in the room. Guide the young person through a *breathing exercise*. Instruct them to focus on the object they have chosen, and begin to take deep breaths. When a thought pops into their mind and breaks their focus on their object, have them pick up one sock ball and put it behind them. Have them set a timer and record how many minutes they were able to focus before they moved each sock ball behind them. Variation – have them set the timer for 3 minutes and record how many sock balls they needed to move in that time. See how many times they can do this without needing to move any socks from their piles.

7. Have kids keep a daily *mandala mood tracker*. Print and mail the templates below to families — or email the mandala mood tracker if they have a printer. Have young people write down their main moods on the lines provided, and give each mood a color. Use the numbers on the mandala as dates of the month, and color their mood in for each date. Have them share their mandala with you when you call to check in. Suggest making it a family activity and have everyone do it!

[Mandala mood tracker 1](#)

[Mandala mood tracker 2](#)

[Mandala mood tracker 3](#)

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8. Download [gamepigeon](#) and *play a game on your phone* with a teenager during a virtual check in. [Here is how](#). Encourage them to play with family members and friends. Use this opportunity to talk to children and parents about online safety and how to report concerns and get help if necessary.

9. If you don't have a smart phone — engage a young person (10 years and up) in texting games.

Story builder. Build a story together. One of you begins by texting a sentence to the other. The other person then texts the second sentence in the story back to the first person. Slowly but surely, the two of you build a story over the course of several texts. Save the text and let the story evolve over several different virtual check ins.

Abbreviations. Text abbreviations back and forth to each other to see who knows the best text abbreviations (e.g. - idk, gtg, rofl, smh, nvm, lmk, etc.).

Name game. Pick a category and text back and forth as fast as you can until the first person runs out of names for the category. E.g. - Fruit, Type of dogs...or Start a trip and work your way through the alphabet. I am going to Italy and I am going to take an apple, and then the other person chooses something that begins with the letter B... The first person who does not text back right away loses.

10. Play a round of **Who Knew?**

Hold up your hand in a fist and take turns finishing this sentence: Who knew I could _____ during this lockdown? If you have tried what the person who finished the sentence says or something very similar to it, raise or put up a finger. The first person who raises all five fingers on their hand wins for most creative ways to deal with the stress of sheltering in place.



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