

Força-Tarefa



**PsiCOVIDa**

Conhecimento científico a favor do bem-estar

# How to deal with CHILDREN'S DIFFICULT behaviors DURING THE COVID-19 pandemic?



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# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated many changes in people's lives. Social distancing, cancelation of face-to-face classes, difficulties in accessing health services, unemployment, financial problems and uncertainties regarding the future can increase the stress of everyday life. Also, families have been spending more time together at home, which in some cases can be a very good thing. However, fights and disagreements can increase as well.

For the families, it can be difficult to deal with work, domestic tasks and childcare. **It is normal to feel anger, sadness and frustration in these moments.** We must be careful not to react aggressively with children, which can worsen the situation. Physical punishment, for example, is used to "educate", but it can harm the health and growth of children.

This guideline was developed to help families in the care of children during the pandemic period.

The topics are based on scientific studies carried out in Brazil and in other countries.



# WHY SOCIAL DISTANCING

## can increase aggressiveness?

### FEAR

It is ok to feel scared in this moment because we don't know what will happen. Fear and other emotions, such as anger, sadness and frustration, can make everyone more nervous and "hot headed".

**Try to be patient to yourself and with those around you, especially the children.**



### STRESS

Although we are not normally aggressive people, the isolation and changes we have experienced can make us stress so much that the possibilities of acting in this way can increase.

**Remember that fighting only makes problems and discomfort worse.**



### LONELINESS

Being away from family, friends and other loved ones increases concerns and feelings that we have no one to count on. When that happens, talk to someone you trust on the phone about how difficult this time is.

**Share your concerns with the people you care about, to receive and give support.**



# WHY SOCIAL DISTANCING

## can increase aggressiveness?



### OVERLOAD

Before the pandemic, most of us did not spend as much time at home with our family as we are now. It is natural to feel irritated at times because the routine has changed. Taking care of children the whole time can make the family tired. Many parents and caregivers have to help children with school activities, which is also a new and exhausting task. **Creating a routine can help. Try to reach agreements with children about times to play, do homework, shower, sleep and eat. Besides that, take care of yourself! Having a good diet and sleeping 8 hours a night is very important.**



### CHILD BEHAVIOR

Children are also frustrated by always being home and not being able to see their friends, teachers, go to school, or go for a walk on the street. It is okay for them to feel sad or angry from time to time. Children's behavior shows these feelings. They can get agitated, cry, throw tantrums, have trouble eating and sleeping. **It is very important that the family has patience and shows that they care about what the child is feeling. This way, he/she realizes that he/she is loved and understood, regardless of his/hers behavior. Fighting and insulting doesn't solve anything.**



### DRINKS ALCOHOLIC AND OTHER DRUGS:

Drinking heavily and/or using drugs can make us more irritable and impulsive. Cigarette smoke damages children's health and makes respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 more serious. **Avoid smoking near children, drinking alcohol, and using other drugs.**

# WHAT DOESN'T WORK TO IMPROVE children's behavior

Certain adult attitudes do not work when educating children. **Shout, insult, hit and shake**, for example, may even stop the child's behavior for the time being. However, they **do not teach positive lessons** and harm children's health and growth. Furthermore, they create fear and can encourage the child to be violent. **These attitudes are considered child abuse.**

The four forms of child abuse are: **neglect, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse.** See each one in detail:

**Physical abuse:** any behavior that could harm the child's body. Examples: hitting, pinching, shaking, kicking, burning, suffocating, among others.



**Neglect:** when family fails to properly care for the children.

Examples: not giving love, not protecting, not bathing, not giving food, not taking the children to the doctor, forgetting to give necessary medicine,

leaving the child alone at home, among others. **During**

**the pandemic, other behaviors are also considered neglect, such as: not washing the child's hands frequently and taking the child to crowds and to public places when it is not necessary.**



# WHAT DOESN'T WORK TO IMPROVE children's behavior

**Psychological Abuse:** any behavior that damages the self-esteem and humiliates the child.

**Examples:** cursing, insulting, using bad words, not paying attention, demanding too much, comparing the child with others, threatening to abandon and hit the child, telling the child that you don't love him/her, that he/she is useless, stupid, ugly and that no one likes him/her.



**Sexual Abuse:** any behavior that sexually involves the child. They do not have the physical and emotional capacity to understand or authorize what is happening.

**Examples:** touching, caressing, making compliments, sexual acts (with or without penetration), saying "bad words" regarding sex, displaying pornographic material, exposing intimate parts, having sex in front of the child, allowing the child to be abused in return of money or favors, among others.



# WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF child maltreatment?

It is very important for everyone to know that maltreatment can have negative consequences for children's health and growth. In some situations, they can even threaten their lives. The main consequences of child maltreatment are:

## **Changes in the way children think:**

Frequently forgetting information, having difficulty maintaining attention, and doing school activities.

## **Changes in the way children feel:**

increased irritability, guilt, shame, fear and sadness. They may feel that they are not important to other people.

## **Changes in the way children behave:**

they can be more aggressive, sleeping or eating more or less than usual, spending more time alone, stop playing or doing the activities they like.

Children who are beaten or humiliated by the family may end up learning that this is the best way to solve problems.

**Don't forget that children learn from adult behaviors and tend to repeat them.**



# WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF child maltreatment?

Adults who were abused as children are more likely to develop mental health problems (anxiety, depression, alcohol or other drug abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder). Additionally, they may have difficulty getting and keeping their job, having healthy relationships, and to present good academic performance.

Romantic relationships and friendships can be affected because this adult grew up believing that violence is a normal way of solving problems. **However, it must be said that suffering abuse causes damage in different moments of life, not only in childhood.**



# POSITIVE WAYS

## to educate children

In many families, insults, screams and physical punishments (such as spanking) are used to stop children's behaviors that are bothering the parents.

**However, these ways of educating children don't allow them to learn positive lessons** and may have negative consequences. With this in mind, we have prepared a list of options that families can use and that are more positive for the children's education.

**"Time out":** there is no point in wanting to solve a problem with "hot head". When you and your child need to calm down, it can be useful to use the time out strategy. **Remain calm and firm** when asking your child to sit still for a few minutes while calming down. **You can use this time to breathe deeply, drink water or spill water on your face in the toilet.** Come back to talk to the child after feeling calmer. Praise when the child is calm. **The time should not be long, one minute for each year of age** (if a kid is 3 years old, 3 minutes).



**REMEMBER: REGARDLESS OF THE CHILD'S AGE AND THE BEHAVIOR THAT HE/SHE PRESENTS, IT IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT TO TALK AND ENCOURAGE THE DIALOGUE**

**Distract attention:** When your child is touching a **dangerous object or doing something he/she shouldn't**, distract with another activity or object. For example, give his/hers favorite toy. This is an option that **works best with young children.**



# POSITIVE WAYS

## to educate children

**Ignore:** It may seem strange, but ignoring children's misbehavior can be helpful at times. **If we pay too much attention when the child does something wrong, the behavior can happen more often.** Ignore the child's difficult behaviors that are only to call out for attention (tantrums, taunts, and screaming). After the child is calmer, try to talk about what happened and explain why he/she can't act like this. The technique should not be used as punishment, but to help the child to calm down and understand that this behavior will not give him/her what he/she wants. **Remember that the child may cry or complain because of tiredness, hunger, pain or some discomfort.** In such cases, do not ignore the behavior and help the child.



**Give options:** Whenever possible, create situations for your child to make decisions, such as choosing the toy or what to eat.

**Remove privileges:** When the child **does not behave well or does something different from what is agreed, you can take away a toy or an activity that he/she likes** (watching television or using the cell phone) for a time that is not very long (a few hours or a day). **You cannot remove what is a basic need of the child, such as food.**

**Set limits:** It is very important for the family to agree with the child on what are the rules and the limits at home. Instructions for children should be short and positive. For example: **"Please organize your toys"** instead of "Why don't you ever organize your toys?". Or even **"only watch cartoons after completing homework"** instead of "homework is more important than watching cartoons" or **"how are you feeling?"** instead of "why are you moody?"



# WHAT TO DO IN ORDER TO avoid being aggressive towards children?

Most cases of child maltreatment happen inside the households. In order to avoid that, the family can use strategies to **control emotions like anger** that can make you feel hot headed and act in an aggressive way.

## HOW TO CONTROL THE ANGER?

Anger is a normal emotion and we all feel it from time to time, even in situations with people we love. Which means that we can feel anger towards some behaviors of the children. **However, if we react when we feel that emotion, it is likely that the result will be very bad.** This happens because anger is an emotion that prepares us to fight. In this situations, we can hurt other people with our actions and words.

We are sure that you want to deal with you anger in a more positive way. For this, the following techniques can help:

**First step: Calm down.** Each of us has different ways of dealing with difficult emotions. When we are angry, usually our heart beats faster, our breathing also speeds up, we start to sweat and it is difficult to even think. To lessen negative feelings, some people leave the room, do breathing exercises, listen to music, take a long shower, cry, pray, find a quiet place, wash their faces and hands.

**The important thing is to get out of the situation that generates the negative emotion, calm the heart rate and breathe deeply (several times).**



# WHAT TO DO IN ORDER TO avoid being aggressive towards children?

## **Second step: Evaluate the situation and solve the problem.**

After calming down, we can think more carefully. When the fight or problem involves children, we can talk to them about what happened and explain how we feel. Help children use words to express their emotions. An example could be: **"Mom was angry because you did not wanted to store your toys as we had agreed before. I believe you are also mad at mom because you don't want to stop playing. How can we solve this problem?"**

This is a very important opportunity for families to explain to children what they can and cannot do. Children need clear limits and rules. Do not use insults or swear words when talking to them. Children are not born knowing how to behave and difficult attitudes are part of learning. We adults are the main examples children have.



# WHAT TO DO IN ORDER TO avoid being aggressive towards children?

## DON'T BLAME THE CHILD

Children think, feel, and behave differently than adults. For this reason, they may have difficulty understanding what COVID-19 is and the changes that are taking place at home, at school, and on the streets.

Because they don't fully understand, they may also have trouble following the rules, such as staying home longer and going out wearing masks (for children over the age of five). They can be just as stressed as adults. It is very important that the family is patient and does not blame the child. **We are all learning to deal with the pandemic and the changes that are taking place.**



# CHILD MALTREATMENT: Where to look for help?

Everyone can help prevent and fight against child maltreatment. Those situations can be reported directly to police stations, the Children's and Adolescents Court, and the Public Ministry. **Search for the services available at your country!**

**DO NOT BE AFRAID TO NOTIFY CHILD MALTREATMENT SITUATIONS. YOU DON'T NEED TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF WHEN YOU MAKE THE NOTIFICATION.**

**DON'T FORGET THAT OUR GREATEST CONCERN MUST BE THE PROTECTION AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN, THAT'S WHY THE NOTIFICATIONS OF WHAT HAPPENED ARE SO IMPORTANT!**



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