

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

Mrs. Ziporah Schuck

Thank you Mrs. Mannes. Thank you Rabbi Horowitz, thank you to all the CEC staff that made this possible tonight, and who made so many different programs available to our Monsey community. And thank you to the parents for joining in tonight because I know how precious your time is, and I know how limited all of our attention spans are at this time.

Before I begin, I'll borrow a line from a new book that just came out, not more than two months ago, the biography of Rebbetzin Jungreis. Rebbetzen Jungreis was a famous lecturer, speaker, kiruv persona, Rebbetzin, and wise woman. She would be up late at night in her Hineni center, giving shiurim and classes, and speaking on the phone to people, advising them. She would be up early in the morning to daven to say Tehillim. Her children often worried, "When do you sleep?" and she would say, "It's fine, I get enough sleep. Don't worry about me." One night they saw the time that she finally went into bed, and, knowing the time that she gets up, they said, "Mommy, it's not possible that you slept more than two hours." To which she replied, "I sleep fast." I thought that was such a fantastic line, and it seems to describe what is happening with our time now. We wake up in the morning, and we look at this whole day ahead of us, with all the children home, with so many different jobs and responsibilities, and at the end of the day we say, "Where did the time go?"

I'm coming to speak to you tonight, really just like you: A parent. I have children in elementary school and children in high school ב"ה, and I'm coming, not to give advice, and not to give ideas, but just to share some different things that friends, family and colleagues have told me. No magic tricks - if any of these ideas are helpful for you, great. If you have ideas that would be helpful for others, please reach out to me through the CEC and let me know. These times are unprecedented. There is nothing any of us could have done to prepare better for what's happening now in our world, in our community, and in our homes. We can't look back at a time in history and learn a lesson of what to do now, we're not sure what the best practices are, there's no research to guide us. The only thing we do know about this time is that from the very beginning, the word essential is connected to parents.

Parents are even more essential than they were before, because they are doing an even bigger job than they were before. And in order to do that job of parenting, Morah, Rebbe, teacher, and tutor, the first thing a parent has to do is to take care of themselves. The way we do that is an idea called "resourcing support". This means looking to see where can I get the help or the support that I need. We live in a community where resources abound, and I am not just talking about Title One. That's one large piece of it, but all of you send your children to schools that are happy to help, they're well connected. They know people who know people. There is an organization that can help you with any need that you may be experiencing now, whether it's financial, tuition, rent, mortgage, or employment. Reach out: Reach out through your schools, reach out through the CEC, reach out to Tomchei Shabbos. Reach out to Kupas Ezra, whether you need your own support to deal with your anxiety, a mental health challenge, or a stress. Reach

out to any of our local agencies. It's almost easier at this time, because so many services are being offered on the phone. If it's hard for you to reach out to your school, you feel like, that's a little awkward, I'm kind of embarrassed to tell them, it's not usual for me, just call and say, "I'm calling for a friend." We're all in this together.

Once you have resourced your support and you've settled whatever could possibly be settled, then, in order to get the tones in our homes that we want, we need to model. How do want our children to remember this time? For them to remember this time, we are what they are going to remember. We're with them all day.

There are five different areas that a parent can focus on modeling.

1. It's temporary! This time shall pass. I know, it feels like we've been doing this forever, and it certainly feels like there is no end in sight, but rest assured, there will be an end. Whether that end is in June, or that end is in September, when they go back to school, things will go back to even a new normal.
2. A sense of safety, of Emunah. Because we say, you can't pour someone a drink from an empty pitcher. This time is confusing, it's hard for you, so reach out to find out more about how you strengthen yourself. If you can only pay attention for a minute, listen to a meaningful minute. If you have time, read a few pages in a book or a sefer. If you have a few minutes, call somebody that you can discuss this with. If you have a longer time and can listen to a shiur, there's no limit to the resources in Emunah. We even call this the Emunah Generation.
3. A sense of coping and calm. Children are looking to us. We are their emotional barometer and emotional thermometer. They look to us to see how we feel, and they take their cues accordingly. Model a sense of, it's hard, it's unexpected, but I can do this. I can try, and I am going to stay as calm as I possibly can during this time.
4. Resilience. Resilience means thinking of all of your strengths, and you have many of them. You've been parenting long before Corona. With what strengths did you parent? Are you emotional? Are you affectionate? Are you creative? Are you organized? These are your strengths. They haven't been forgotten about or cancelled now. Draw on your strengths; you're not expected to be someone different, you're expected to be you.
5. Flexibility. That is the key to survival. It's not possible to keep to the same routine or structure in a rigid fashion, which some of us did before this. The news changes, the school schedule changes, the hot line phone number changes, the work requirement changes. Everything is changing, so bring that spirit of flexibility into your home.

After you are the model of this, we think about the job at hand. And it's a job that none of us signed up for. Unfortunately, quitting is not an option, unlike schools where a teacher could call in sick for a day off and hire a substitute. It's not possible now, so what can you do, how can you do this? To explain how you can do this, I will use the analogy of the New York City Marathon.

The New York City Marathon is one of the most famous marathons run in the entire world. It is 26.2 miles, through all five boroughs of New York City. Approximately 55,000 runners run in the New York City Marathon. The top runner, the one who comes in in the shortest amount of time,

leaves with a grand prize of over \$100,000. The second place runner gets about half of that. How many of these 55,000 runners think that they have a chance of beating that world record time? Actually it's less than 200. 200 might be world-class athletes, professional marathon runners. What are the other 54,000 and change runners doing?

They're running with a concept called "Personal Best." They're not running to do better than the last time they did, all they can expect from themselves is their best and that's all that we can expect from ourselves. Each day, we get up to do our best, and that's all we can expect from our children - to do their best. Their best is going to vary. For some of our children, their best might be just listening to their classes. For another child, his best might be not fighting with a sibling, and for another child, his best might be helping out a little bit more. We don't all have the same running time. Let's give ourselves the chance to do our best.

Here are some things that really interfere and take away from a person doing his best:

The first is information overload. That's the people that are listening to the news lines, checking the papers, checking online on a very frequent basis. What did the Governor say? Is it going to be over May 15th, June 1st, June 15th? What about sleepaway camp? What about day camp? What about this? What about that? All of that information is going to change, minute by minute. If you tune in later, if you listen tomorrow, you'll get caught up, but too much news coming in fills our head.

The other thing that takes away from us doing our Personal Best is comparing ourselves to others. We all know somebody, she might be a friend, it might be a neighbor, it might be a relative who casually mentioned to you that during this time, their son memorized five Mesechtos, their daughter learned Latin, or their four-year-old learned to ten-braid Challah!

We start to think about what's going on in our house, and then she continues to tell you that her children all follow a color coded schedule. Everybody is where they should be at every part of the day on fifteen minute intervals, including her spouse, and everything works out perfectly.

If you're the parent of that child, we're happy for you. Really, we are, but don't tell it to anybody else. Just tell it to that child's grandparent, and if you're listening to somebody tell you about this, STOP LISTENING. It's not going to be helpful. I guarantee you're not getting the whole story. You do your best, and your child's best, and we have a lot of strengths that we can know that Personal Best from. We say success breeds success, and it's not just a saying, it's true. When we feel we have the capacity or the capability to do something, we're able to energize ourselves and motivate ourselves to do even better.

What success do we have? Well, let's look at this whole quarantine or lockdown period and divide it into three distinct time frames.

We've already finished the two hardest ones. The first came shortly after Purim, when life as we knew it completely changed. No school, no shuls, social distancing, the death rate happening in New York City, the hospitals, Hatzalah. It was a scary time for all of us. We finished that.

Our next time period was Pesach, where many of us made Pesach under circumstances that we couldn't have dreamed before that we would be able to do, by ourselves, without family, for the first time. We did that, and we did well.

And now it brings us into our third time period, from now until it ends. If you got through the first two, you have all the tools you need to get through the last one. The same way we can compliment ourselves that we did it, we survived, we coped well, we can compliment our children by pointing out the areas that they're doing well, things they've mastered, things that are going right. Sometimes, in a school, when I'm working with a teacher, before the teacher wants to tell me about something that may not be going so well, I usually like to ask the question, "What's going right? What is working?" Because when we look at it through that lens, we're able to build from a place of strength. Build your children's strengths.

You do you!

I can't repeat that enough. Sure, there's a global nature to what's happening to all of us, things that are common, but there's such an individual aspect. Nobody knows your feelings, nobody knows the people you're living with, nobody knows what your challenges are. You have to do it in the way that works for you. If that's hard, that's okay, you're in good company. Everyone is struggling.

So how do we do it? How do we get it all done into a day, way more than we thought we could?

I'd like to condense what we need to do in a day, into four main categories, juggling balls if you want to visualize that. Just as a juggler has his or her hands on only one or two of the balls at the same time, because other balls are either flying or falling, that's what has to happen in our day. In order to create a sense of control in an out-of-control time period, using these juggling balls to kind of have a loose routine is very helpful. It's helpful to children as well; it gives them a sense of purpose; it gives them a sense of accomplishment when finished.

I'd like to call the four categories the four "R's"

We always refer to four "R's" as: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Recess.

We're changing that the four "R's" now:

1. Religion
2. Responsibility
3. Recreations
4. Relationships

Each of these categories has a drop-down menu under it. For every one of you on the line tonight, that drop-down menu is going to be different.

1. Religion, or Yiddishkeit:

What has to happen in a day? Children need to daven, parents need to daven as well. Children need to bentch, others might be saying Tehillim. Boys might be learning, girls might be listening in on their phone lines, and somebody might be telling me a shiur. How much of it happened is up to you.

2. Responsibility: Things that really need to happen.

For many of you, it's a job, and not just a job of mother, cook, and housekeeper, but it's a job that you're doing on computer because your job is still needed. For children, their job is to be a student, and that job hasn't ended. They might have to call in at a certain time, get onto a zoom class, listen to a recording, complete an assignment. There might be some follow up homework. Responsibility for everybody in the house is to keep the house running; there might be meals to be prepared, laundry to be done, and beds to be made. Another responsibility, even if we can relax it, is bed time and wake up. Sure, it is usually later than it was when buses had to be gotten to, but we still want children to have enough sleep to be able to function properly the next day.

3. Recreation:

Recreation includes a lot of different things. It includes that ability to be creative. It includes playing, relaxing, reading, or getting some physical movement in: Exercise, a walk, a bike ride, jump rope. Recreation also includes attending to our feelings and emotions. If you had an anxious child before corona, and if the anxiety was not school based, chances are they're struggling now. Many children are struggling. That's one area that you can reach out to CEC, your school, or an agency, and get some ideas about how to relax the child. There are many children who are more anxious about their social standing or their school performance. They're actually doing better at home now.

4. Relationships:

This is spending time together as a family, a parent with their child. Doing some chesed for others, whether it's calling a grandparent, checking up on a neighbor, waving to somebody. It's encouraging socialization in a way that is acceptable at this time. Maybe children can talk from one yard to the next, they can surely call each other on the phone, and it's getting along with siblings in the house. On any given day, you may drop some of these balls. You may make conscious choices to drop some of these balls. Today, we are saying tehillim all day because my grandmother is sick. Okay, supper was a peanut butter sandwich. On another day, you might have prepared a gourmet meal, but you weren't able to attend to taking everybody for a walk. We're not worried about a day by day decision; we're looking at the overall pattern.

Do these four building blocks to help you create a routine to pass through the time and to move through the day.

One thing that we didn't include as your responsibility is chinuch. Let me explain that of course it's still the parents' responsibility, but it is not the parents' worry. All children are exactly where they need to be right now; nobody's behind, and nobody's ahead. As schools, we're learning a lot about what's really important about education.

One thing we learned is that teachers are almost like first responders. Students wait for their teachers to call, wait for their teachers to drive by, and look excitedly at the packets to see what's in them. If your child's teacher has not reached out on an individual basis yet, please let your school know. I know from the principals, that was key and of great importance to them. Keeping that connection with school is done by being a part of what their class is doing. What is their class

doing? Most of the schools have made very careful decisions to choose skills to maintain and skills to advance. We look at which skills to choose based on what will be considered cumulative for next year. Are there things that aren't going to get done? Of course! But again, that's not your worry. There are teachers keeping logs of items they're letting go of. The school's going to figure out how to fit it in, catch up or do a redo in September.

The grass is not greener on the other side. We talked before about comparing: This is one big area parents are comparing. In my neighbor's child's school, they have this type of learning platform with this many hours. My school is only doing this, my school has too little, my school has too much. My school has no accountability; my school is much too strict about accountability. It's almost impossible to please all the people, all the time. If you're curious how your school came to this conclusion, call a principal, ask a teacher. Careful decisions were made. I know that many schools are using a combination of learning modalities. These are times that there are live conferences, either on the phone or through zoom. There might be some independent work, or there might be prerecordings to listen to that allows for an adjustable and flexible schedule.

How do we support what the schools are doing? We like to think teamwork makes the dream work. We need positivity, parenting, and believing in the school. If our children hear us complaining all day about the poor quality of instruction that is happening now, about how our tuition should be changed because...Those might be valid complaints, but complain to somebody that can actually do something about it. If your child's complaining that it's hard for him to sit, it's hard for him to focus, it's hard for him to learn, validate. Of course, validation is not an agreement, validation is just accepting, and even agreeing a little, that your child has that feeling. You don't have to agree that it's true. We say, validate publicly, complain in private. And if a complaint comes up, you deal with it, because you're a parent, because somebody handed you that child many years ago, and they also handed you a super magical power. All parents have that power of being problem solvers. Kick into your problem solving ability. Pretend it's a friend or a neighbor reaching out to you and saying, I have this dilemma, I have this challenge. How can I? What can I? Should I? Ideas just flow. Remove yourself and think objectively. I guarantee you a good idea will come up.

Something helpful for students is to have a designated place if possible in your house. You might have different places for Kodesh or general studies. You might have different places on different days. But we're not having a scavenger hunt, or needing a map on a day by day basis - where should I go? Where should I put my things?

Something else that is helpful, which is something many of the schools can help you out with, is enough phone lines in your house. Even small phones that might have a certain amount of minutes to be able to call in, are helpful.

Have supplies together: Some children, day after day, are missing out on valuable instruction, interesting stories, and personal connections from the teacher, because that's when they're running around the house, looking for their pencil, a sharpener, or a pen. Try to keep it in one place. One mother told me her child keeps her things in her book bag and she just moves her book bag wherever she is going to be learning.

You know your children, you know your availability and you know your schedule. There are some children that need more help technically to get on, although many of our children have surprised us with how tech savvy they are, figuring out the hash and pound signs, the call in numbers, and the access code. If we need to be there for the beginning of the session, okay. If we need to be there for more of the session, how can we work that into our schedule? It's not always easy. We're going to have children that are completely resistant, every school knows that. And I'm not advising you to argue or fight with your child or even force them. I'm asking you to explore: Is there anything else we could do to help this child get onto the phone learning, or their Zoom learning? If the answer is no, then what I need you to do is to reach out to the teacher or reach out to the principal. It's okay, we know who these children are, we even probably guessed ahead of time.

What's not okay is not letting somebody know. We need to make alternative plans. Maybe these are skills that you will reinforce, teach, or carry over. At the very least, we need to know what they missed.

If your child is not completely resistant, but every now and then is giving you a hard time, that's the perfect opportunity for a day off, or an early dismissal. If they're doing it but need a little extra motivation, well, there's always incentives. Last time I checked, ice cream hasn't been cancelled, prizes haven't been cancelled. Sometimes children need a little more to get through a harder time. And what a time it is. This is a time to make memories as a family, and making memories doesn't have to be involved, time consuming, or cost money. It just means giving it some attention, some of the time. Do we want our children to remember that they almost heard their mother or father say: "The best part about corona, about quarantine, was spending more time with you"? Is that the message we sent, or did they know that their parents finished Sefer Tehillim, that their school bus should arrive even one day earlier?

So what type of early memories? We can put together a couple of ideas. They're not meant to be intimidating: If you feel like, listen, I have healthy children, they got into bed, supper included something that wasn't chocolate or sugar, I think a schoolbook was open, and that's a successful day, I'm done, then all the more power to you, I get it!

If you have time to do a little bit more, here's a couple of ideas that might help:

- Refrigerator Central:

If your refrigerator is magnetized, great. If not, it can be a bulletin board, it's a central meeting place that everybody kind of passes through on a daily basis, and we post all different things on that place. One mother told me that she posted something called "Corona Café". She said, "Listen, the schools make a menu for what they're serving for lunch. I can make a menu for what I'm serving for supper so that the kids stop asking all day, 'what's for supper? What's for supper?'" Another mother titled a paper, "What should I eat?", and she put a list of all the things the children can take for themselves for snack, or things that she'd be willing to prepare.

- There might be a night activity that you can plan and put on the calendar. The night activity doesn't have to be as grand as camp night activity. It might mean making s'mores, playing a game, going outside together, doing a scavenger hunt.
- Some parents are making a time capsule. A time capsule sounds like a science experiment, but it's not. It's taking a Ziploc bag or a bin, and every now and then, putting items in so that when we open this time capsule in ten years from now, we'll look back and laugh, "Wow that was so significant then." Kids love to be involved in selecting the items. Chances are that the first item in will be a mask.
- Some parents like to focus this "Refrigerator Central" on a positive time and a positive aspect, so they have some sentences that they leave up on the refrigerator. These sentences don't have an ending, and anyone in the family can fill in the ending.

Some of those starters are:

This isn't cancelled..., The first thing I'll do..., The best part of quarantine...

And the children will surprise you with the creativity and the cleverness of their answers.

These are just some ideas to help you organize, structure your day, support yourself, and support your children.

But before we end, I want to tell you that there are two **very large** categories that I did not address tonight. These categories need much more attention than I have in the scope of this type of teleconference, and if you find yourself in one of those two categories, none of these ideas might work. I get it, I really do.

The first category is children that are in a sense of grief: If they have either lost somebody in their family during this time, or they've suffered a trauma or a loss during this past year, so this entire time period has an overlay of grief.

That needs its own attention. If you are in that category or you need more support, I would urge you to reach out to O.H.E.L. or to Chai Lifeline; they may be able to help.

I also did not specifically address if you have a special circumstance. A special circumstance might be that you're a single parent and you're doing this all alone, or you have a special needs child that's not getting their regular programming, and that's taking all your time and attention away from some of the other children. I get it, those are unique circumstances and I urge you to reach out to organizations that might be able to help you. Maybe try Sister to Sister, maybe LINKS, maybe HaMasveh, and maybe they'll be able to help you navigate and juggle through this time.

For the rest of you, I wish you a tremendous amount of Hatzlacha. I hope to meet up again very soon, in Yerushalayim and I hope you come through this time with happy and healthy children!