May 2021: Caregivers

An offering to New Mexicans from the faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education at the University of New Mexico.
Caregivers

We’re mindful of how difficult the pandemic has been on caregivers. Those taking care of children or parents; those taking care of the ill or elderly. We’re mindful of the toll the pandemic has taken on women and minorities especially. Caregiving comes at considerable cost, although it affords many benefits as well.
One afternoon last March while I was cooking dinner, helping my son with his schoolwork, and trying to read for my class, my heart began to beat so quickly and as I took deep breaths, I struggled to take in air.

My fingers started to tingle. I began to sob… fear overcame my entire body. How do I keep my children from becoming sick? How can I protect my parents and in-laws? What will happen if my husband or I catch Covid19? How can work from home, be teacher, take care of my family, and get enough sleep to get through the day? So many unknowns and so many questions at the time. The next day, I spoke with two of my closest friends, they felt the same way. Many woman like myself shared my story.

My role as a caregiver took on a completely new dimension during the 2020 Pandemic. When I look back at the last year, I think to myself, “How did I keep together?” The truth is I did not keep it together some of the time. Some days I was rockin’ it! On other days, I was a hot mess—literally, with my hair in a messy bun and wearing stained pajama pants. I dove into my work. I cried when I was by myself. I exercised daily to keep myself from losing it completely. I used perspective taking as my source of thought. I kept telling myself that others had it so much worse. At least we were healthy, at least we had a food, and at least we were together.

Even though I have always been a person who sees the glass as half full, I realized that I could have down days and I did not have to be positive every day. I realized I could cry, eat chocolate, and binge on This is Us. I realized I had to give myself some grace. Raising three beautiful boys, working fulltime, finishing grad school, and living through a pandemic was enough to bring anyone to a breaking point. Once I came to this realization, I figured out our schedules, set up boys with their own desks, and found ways to be in the moment with my family. I was able to embrace the pure joy that often accompanies being a caregiver.

Many of my friends and family have little ones with ages ranging from six months to five years of age. They would call me in panic and ask how they can help their child learn at home. I reminded them of the importance of just being in the moment with their child to create as many early positive and reinforcing experiences as possible. At the UNM Family Development Program, we are always stressing the importance relationship and play. Let’s face it, play is essential for every one of us. I also gave them several resources that to support them in their journeys. (See below)

Caregiving can be difficult and tedious even without living through a pandemic. COVID 19 has added to the existing challenges we face as caregivers. It is essential to take care of one another and ourselves during this time. Most importantly breathe and be kind to yourself. You are a Rock Star Caregiver!

Resources
https://fdp.unm.edu/everyday-junk-recipes.htm
Everyday JUNK (Joy in Understanding New Knowledge) guide’s parents and caregivers to use common, everyday “stuff” found in homes as great learning materials. The Resource List will get you started with ideas of what young children love best. You can add your own “stuff” as you figure out lots of creative ways to adapt our suggestions. The heart of these recipes is remembering to embrace the JOY of having fun with your child through playful learning.

https://momentsnm.org/
Moments Together is a campaign that helps families and caregivers give their children a great start in life. Based on research that early learning promotes brain development, it provides
easy tips and resources for parents to do more with their moments together. This campaign is a collaborative effort between the State of New Mexico’s Early Childhood Education & Care Department, NMPBS, MediaDesk, UNM Family Development Program and United Way of Central New Mexico to offer encouragement and support for all New Mexican families.

https://www.facebook.com/pbjfamilyservices/videos/272482874480915
Sam Rodriguez, LBSW, Training & Development Consultant, UNM Family Development Program & Daniella, mother of two, talk about the importance of self-care and playfulness when it comes to being nurturing parents.

https://www.gottman.com/blog/mindful-parenting-how-to-respond-instead-of-react
Mindful parenting means that you bring your conscious attention to what is happening, instead of getting hijacked by your emotions. This article gives helpful strategies for understanding how to respond instead of reacting to your child’s behavior during stressful times.

Keep on Keeping On

You’re vaccinated but your kids aren’t:
• Now what?
• Can you travel for summer vacation?
• Can your kids visit with extended family?
• Can kids have playdates?

When might vaccines be available for kids?
• Teens 16 and over -- are eligible for the Pfizer vaccine NOW in New Mexico.
• Ages 12-15 -- are also eligible for the Pfizer vaccine now in New Mexico. Perhaps younger ages by the end of summer?
• Ages 6 months-11 years -- Studies are underway. Perhaps by 2022?
• Why are kids’ vaccines slow in coming?

Masks, six feet between people, other social distancing, hand sanitizer, and hand washing remain as important as they have been -- for you (yet) and your kids.
New Mexico’s vaccination rate is climbing. Our Governor is talking about removing most protective measures on June 30.

Kids are back in school now and all may be back in August. It looks like things are getting back to normal. At least I hear that phrase a lot these days. Yet is Back to Normal what we will actually get? Is Back to Normal what we really want? I’ve been using the phrase Forward to Normal.

I don’t believe Back to Normal is accurate, desirable, or best for our wellbeing. This pandemic has stretched on long enough that things have irreversibly changed. We have suffered individual and collective losses -- those who have died, those with long-haul COVID or other persistent effects, those with job and income loss, celebrations and gatherings we didn’t have. Those are not coming “back”. Back to Normal also implies that we’ve had no good losses nor any gains during this time. Ignoring the pain and loss as well as the gains is not good for us.

Forward to Normal acknowledges all that has happened -- good and bad. It permits us to move through our experiences to new ones, formed by what has been, while looking forward to what is to come. It gives us the opportunity actively to shape and form that normal, to make choices about what will be. We can return to what was when that’s a good choice for us and move to new things if that would be a better choice.

When you hear the phrase “Back to Normal”, use that as a prompt to pause for a few moments to take stock of what you have lost during this time as well as what you have learned and gained, how you have grown, and what you want “Normal” to be like.

Perhaps you noticed that I’m fine with the word “Normal”. Getting back to a sense of everyday routine, to things that nurture us, to highs and lows, and, perhaps most importantly, some sense of predictability in our lives, some sense of control, will be very good for us. I’m looking forward to that!
I’ve been calling it the reemergence for some reason.

I’m not sure why, but I said it one day, and it fit for me. I recently decided to look up the definition and I think it might fit better than I thought... “to be seen or known again…” The description includes hibernating animals reemerging after the winter (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021). It’s been A LONG winter!!

I’m reemerging from every day being filled with zoom. I still have many zoom meetings, but I get to have some outings that don’t involve a computer, which has been uplifting and refreshing. The outings have also been a bit anxiety provoking. Even with being vaccinated I feel inundated with the possibility of exposure to a variant, or the randomness of a possible breakthrough infection.

I’m reemerging from being in the same space during all conversations and so I feel a bit socially awkward. Reemergence into everyday moments and conversations is hard. I have been staring at thumbnail sized faces on a screen for telehealth sessions with clients, classes with students, supervision sessions, and all meetings. In person I feel a bit overstimulated. I don’t know where to look sometimes while engaged in conversation. I guess I also started to rely on mute in meetings; I missed the initial conversational banter, but now it feels interesting to be able to talk with several people and not have to mute and then unmute.

For my first meeting out a few weeks ago, I felt as though I packed for a weekend trip. Snack, check. Water, check. Wearing professional pants, check. Brushed my teeth, check. Purse filled with everything that I could possibly need that is typically on my desk, check! What a process!

And the pets! I have loved every moment with my cats this past year. They were confused at the beginning when I never left the house and now, I think we have all adjusted to life lived every day together. My cat Vladimir is not happy when I have been gone and he definitely tells me how he feels when I get home. I think pets could really struggle with the reemergence.

In the reemergence we may find ourselves feeling uncomfortable, feeling awkward, missing our homes and pets, we may find out some restaurants and stores have closed, and as we catch up with colleagues, friends, and peers we may learn about loss and struggle. We will experience a variety of emotions in this reemergence: sadness, joy, excitement, anxiety, stress, overwhelm, dissonance.... We may say something weird because we haven’t needed the same “filter” at home. We may forget to complete a task. We may have to shift our conception of time again and as a result, mismanage time a bit (I have struggled in this area!). We may just not want to leave the house sometimes. As we navigate through this reemergence, my hope is that we can all give ourselves, and one another, grace.

- 6 Tips From a Therapist For Coping with Reopening Anxiety
- These people thrived in pandemic isolation -- and aren’t ready to return to ‘normal’ socializing
- 10 Positive Outcomes of the Pandemic
- 2 Competing Impulses Will Drive Post-pandemic Social Life
- If You Don’t Want to Go, Say No
- Feeling Blah During the Pandemic? It’s Called Languishing
- The Other Side of Languishing Is Flourishing, Here’s How to Get There.
- Changes, challenges: The not-so-secret life of pandemic pets
All of these changes!
Some are true losses big and small.
Some, though, are gains.

While the prolonged stress and strain of the Covid-19 pandemic is felt by all,

Current research indicates that women (especially others and womxn from minority backgrounds) are disproportionately burdened in the workforce and in the home compared to men. This structural imbalance can be understood through the numerous explicit and implicit roles and duties that women are expected to perform. In the workforce, the gender wage-gap is perpetuated at every educational level; women average approximately 82 cents for every dollar a man earns, even in female-dominated professions (NPR, 2021). While this financial inequality is not novel, the pandemic has limited the financial resources for many individuals and families. When working parents are determining the needs of their families and fiscal impact, it is often mothers who sacrifice their employment or modify their working schedule.

However, this is a more complex issue than determining who has more earning potential in a time of economic downturn. Sociologists and economists have noted that even women with advanced degrees and higher incomes (i.e., the breadwinners) are facing a substantive professional and emotional pandemic penalties. Such penalties are, in part, associated with the emotional labor and home-making responsibilities that many women and mothers face daily. Study findings by Johnson et al. (2020) illustrate that working women spend twice as much time on child-rearing, homeschooling, and domestic chores compared to their male partners throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Women have long endured the patriarchal expectations of society; and the global impact of the pandemic has exacerbated this systemic and gendered disparity, bringing this pervasive issue into clearer focus.

With clearer focus, our goal as a post-pandemic society should not be to normalize, minimize, or idealize this disproportionate burden on women. Instead, we should cultivate a “new normal” that demands greater equity in our culture – both at work and at home. Women deserve an economy that provides infrastructure for support: equal compensation, accessible family-friendly workplace policies, and appropriate resources for respite and recognition (Bateman & Ross, 2020). In the powerful words of Malala Yousafzai, “I raise up my voice not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.”

In the spirit of raising our voices, how might you advocate with or celebrate the women in your life this month of May? Below is a list of articles and resources to continue learning about pandemic effects on women and mothers.

**Reading Resources:**
- (NPR Series) Enough Already: [How the Pandemic Is Breaking Women](https://www.npr.org)
- TODAY survey about pandemic parenting for moms
- Zoom Burnout Is Real, and It’s Worse for Women
- Why ‘stay-at-home parent’ is a job title
- Why Women Do the Household Worrying
- Covid-19 and Gender Inequality: [Mckinsey Study](https://www.mckinsey.com)
- Forbes: [Women and the Pandemic](https://www.forbes.com)
- Brookings: [Covid-19 and Working Women](https://www.brookings.edu)
- What Women Need: [Agenda to Move Women and Families Forward](https://wwwagenda.org)
The Covid-19 pandemic and its subsequent ramifications has brought a unique set of struggles to the caregivers of young children.

During this time, early childhood educators, providers, and parents have considered how to continue to educate children in a safe and developmentally appropriate way. Working with young children can be overwhelming in the best of times, but this past year has often forced caregivers to work continuously. Children have relied on their parents and teachers to help them navigate these many new concepts they may not fully understand—social distancing, isolation, societal and racial trauma, mask-wearing, etc. This can leave little time for caregivers to focus on their own needs and stressors.

It is important that people who are taking care of others also find time to take care of themselves. A caregiver cannot provide the best possible support unless their own needs are also being met. This is easier said than done, as each person’s duties and responsibilities are different, and it can sometimes be a challenge to find even 5 minutes during the day to focus on oneself. Yet “putting your own mask on before assisting others” can take on many forms and functions. In some instances, you can do both at the same time.

Using child-centered strategies, caregivers can encourage positive behaviors and development in children while also supporting their own needs in the process. Here are 4 strategies that caregivers of any age can benefit from:

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a model that shows us how our needs as humans have an impact on our development (Maslow, 1943). We start at the bottom, with our most basic needs like food and water and shelter, etc. We can only move up the pyramid to our other needs, like having friendships, learning in school, things like that, if the needs below have been met. With young children, having a routine is something they can depend on so they know when to expect meals, when they’ll go to bed, and when they get to play. All of this predictability helps meet children’s basic needs, which will lessen children’s anxiety in general and build their emotional stability and their sense of security.

By building a routine for our kids, we are also building on the emotional security and sense of stability in the whole family/classroom unit. This can be especially important if you are expecting a big change in your life, like moving or having a new baby. Children who already have a routine in place are more likely to go with the flow during change. A strong routine can be helpful to the whole family unit. It can encourage your family’s teamwork and lessen power struggles because you can use the routine as a reasoning tool.
If you’re starting with no routines in place, take it slow. Begin with one or two changes and work your way up. We are the models for our children, so if our new routine is exciting and a good thing for us, then we are showing them that it’s a good thing for them, too.

Frame your routine around healthy eating and sleeping habits, or whatever is most beneficial to your family or classroom.

Find a way to engage your child in the process. If your child is into stickers, you can start a sticker chart or a visual schedule. This is another way to make the process fun and help them feel like they have choices and control in their lives.

Be open to flexibility. This routine needs to work for all of you for the long haul. So, if something is not working, it’s okay to pick your battles and adjust. Finding those adjustments and working with them, rather than against them, will help so much in the long run. We are just doing our best, so if there’s an off day or week, it doesn’t mean you can’t go back and try again. Be kind to yourself because there’s no failure here, just family growth.

**Practice self-care and model self-care for children.**

Children look to the adults in their life for how to act in stressful situations. This concept is called social referencing, and it is an important component in children’s social-emotional development (Walle, Reschke, & Knothe, 2017). While social referencing is typically associated with flashbulb memories or injurious situations, it can also be considered in our day-to-day lives. How children will deal with stressors reflects the adult coping mechanisms they have been exposed to. Therefore, modeling positive self-care and verbalizing those concepts to children teaches them how to take care of their bodies and minds, both now and in the future.

Let’s look at Nina as an example. Nina is a lead teacher in a childcare setting. She is under a lot of stress at work and in her home life, which she is having trouble managing while she is teaching. Instead of letting her negativity manifest in the classroom, Nina has decided to approach each day with mindfulness. She “checks in” with her body and mind throughout the day and models this for her students as well.

If Nina is feeling overwhelmed with her students, she verbalizes it by saying “I am feeling overwhelmed, I wonder what I should do about this?” As her students get used to this approach, they begin giving Nina suggestions like “drink some water,” “take deep breaths,” “do some stretches,” or “read a book!” Then Nina can perform these actions with her whole class or with students one-on-one. Not only is Nina taking care of her own needs, but her students are also benefiting by learning these coping mechanisms to use when they are feeling overwhelmed. Nina begins to see the behaviors in her classroom diminish because the children have learned how to care for their stressful emotions in a healthy way.

**Read every day!**

Reading is a fundamental component of school readiness and literacy skills in children, and it also comes with a plethora of social-emotional benefits. Children learn vocabulary words, different world perspectives, and how to handle a variety of social situations through stories. Reading together also provides a chance for children to bond with their caregivers through physical connectivity and conversation.

On top of these general benefits, many children’s books specifically focus on learning about emotions and how to handle big feelings when they come up. This provides children with a neutral and safe outlet to think about emotions in different situations. Thankfully, there are children’s books on just about every topic. If you know a child who is dealing with a specific concern or hardship, there is a book out there that can help. They are often free and easily accessible through library systems, ebook websites like getepic.com, and Youtube.
Here is a list of high-quality social-emotional books for children:

**Children's Books for Healing and Trauma:**
- Healing Days by Susan Farber Straus
- Once I was Very Very Scared by Chandra Ghosh Ippen
- Good Morning Yoga by Marriam Gates
- Breathe like a Bear by Kira Willey
- Good People Everywhere by Lynea Gillen

**Children's Books about Social Justice:**
- I am Perfectly Designed by Karamo Brown
- I am Enough by Grace Byers
- All Are Welcome by Suzanne Penfold
- My Heart Will Not Sit Down by Mara Rockliff
- Come with Me by Holly McGhee

**Children's Books that promote Empathy, Friendship, Social Development:**
- I Am Peace by Susan Verde
- When Sophie’s Feelings are Really, Really Hurt by Molly Bang
- The Way I Feel by Janan Cain
- Love Makes a Family by Sophie Beer
- How Full is Your Bucket? (For Kids) By Tom Rath
- The Todd Parr Series

**Children's Books on Hygiene:**
- Germs Are Not for Sharing by Elisabeth Verdies
- Sick Simon by Dan Krall
- Big Smelly Bear by Britta Teckentrup
- I Don't Want to Wash my Hands by Tony Ross
- Fight the Germs by Divya Mohan

References


All of our relationships take extra attention right now. Conflict, unfortunately, happens easily.

The psychological examination of fathers’ involvement in childcare in Western societies has gained considerable attention since the 1970s.

Michael Lamb wrote his first book on fathers highlighting the notion of “forgotten” fathers because they were often considered “mothers’ substitutes” for childcare in the family. Based on research from non-Western cultural settings, Margaret Mead coined the expression “fathers are biological necessities, but social accidents” suggesting fathers’ peripheral role in childcare tasks. Influenced by the practice of patriarchy and hegemonic gender roles, most nation-states including industrial societies underscore fathers’ moral teaching, protective, and providing roles in the family throughout much of human history. The analysis of the global data indicates that only 44% of fathers are involved in childcare in the family. Jaipaul Roopnarine’s work chronicles how the practice of mate-shifting undercuts fathers’ involvement in childcare in Caribbean families. The lack of or limited fathers’ role in childcare is a too-common story across cultural groups except for some indigenous communities. But the good news is that social perception and dynamics regarding fathers’ involvement in childcare is changing for the better.

Contemporary scholars have been examining fathers’ involvement in childcare within cross-cultural as well as within cultural perspectives because the experiences, expectations, and practices of fatherhood vary across cultures. The growing interest in fathers’ role in childcare is mostly due to greater economic and political opportunities for women as well as the importance of fathers’ contribution to child development. Responding to a myriad process of social change over time, contemporary fathers have been changing their traditional “providing” and “disciplinarian” roles in the family. Recent findings suggest that fathers play both “provider” and “caregiver” roles. A comprehensive research analysis (J. Roopnarine; E. Yildirim) highlight the variations in the amount of time fathers spend in childcare each day across developed and developing societies. Reports suggest that Chinese fathers spend between 0-60 minutes, Japanese fathers spend 39 minutes, Dutch fathers spend 50 minutes, and Portuguese fathers spend 134 minutes in routine childcare each day. My research on African-American, Navajo Indian, Mexican immigrant, Malaysian, and Bangladeshi families also shows that although mothers are the primary childcare providers, fathers have been increasingly getting more involved in childcare activities. In particular, Navajo Indian fathers spend 84% as much time as mothers spend in childcare. The encouraging fact is that men are redefining their traditional breadwinner role and are increasingly attending to children’s care and emotional responsibilities.

Considering fathers’ involvement in care activities, ethnographic studies (S. Beckerman; H. Fouts; S. Harkness; B. Hewlett; K. Hill; M. Hurtado; C. Super; P. Valentine) have identified several categories of fathers as follows: Intimate fathers, Distant fathers, and Multiple fathers. Unlike fathers in industrial societies where rough-tumble play is a way to bond with the infant, Aka fathers in Africa spend a lot of time holding and caring for the infant. They are known as the most intimate fathers as they carry the baby when mothers and fathers go to the forest for hunting, take care of the baby when the baby is sick, and
routinely spend almost 40% of the daylight time holding the baby. On the other hand, the Efe and the Kipsigis of East Africa are termed as distant fathers as they are more likely to focus on economic and disciplinary roles in the family. Likewise, Chinese and Indian fathers also fall under the “distant/stern fathers” category. Within lowland South American hunting and gathering societies (e.g., Ache of Paraguay), families underline the importance of social fathers over biological fathers. Paternity in these societies is uncertain because there is a belief that any man that engaged in sexual intercourse with the mother up to a year before the pregnancy, as well as during the pregnancy, is a father of the child. In this matrilocal society, children are more likely to survive if they have multiple fathers because more male adults are providing and caring for the child.

Research indicates that most children in forager, farming, and pastoral cultures are socially, emotionally, cognitively, and morally competent. These children benefit from multiple and engaged fathers, extended caregivers, and societies that do not stress competition and inequality. The parental acceptance-rejection theory (A. Khaleque; R. Rohner) stresses that parental warmth, attention, acceptance, and affection strengthen the father-child bond resulting in children’s positive social, emotional, physical, and intellectual outcomes. Symbolizing warmth and affection, about 70% of American fathers are found to hug their young children each day. The bioecological systems theory (U. Bronfenbrenner) underscores that fathers’ involvement in childcare must be contextualized within their unique socio-cultural and ecological settings. The general finding is that compared to mothers, fathers spend less time with their children, but fathers are doing the best that they can, given their particular economic, ecological, and cultural contexts. It is safe to proclaim that high father involvement in childcare is not natural or universal and policymakers need to consider context, norms, and personal belief structures regarding fathers’ roles in childcare. The Scandinavian countries are leading the way in instituting up to 18 months of paid parental leave to encourage and enable fathers to be involved and care for their children.

I recommend the following books on fathers’ involvement in childcare:

- **Fatherhood** (R. Parke, Harvard University Press, 1996),
- **Fathering in cultural contexts: Developmental and clinical issues** (J. Roopnarine & E. Yildirim, Routledge, 2019)
- **Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspective** (N. Cabrera & C. Tamis-LeMonda, Taylor and Francis, 2013)


Caregivers

‘I Used to Like School’: An 11-Year-Old’s Struggle With Pandemic Learning


Teen stress has been heightened by a year of pandemic. Here’s how to help them


Eating Disorders in Teens Have ‘Exploded’ in the Pandemic


Resources

Economic Council Helping Others: Food bank, Hygiene Kits
https://echoinc.org/

What’s Next?

Identities -- June 9 -- Summer is free of the molding and constraints of schools for kids. It also relaxes constraints on adults. And that’s when we’re not emerging from a fifteen-month-long pandemic! Summer is an awesome time to consider who we are, to try new things, to try new parts of who we are. To explore. Whether that’s Pride Month in June, or pent-up vacation travel, or redefining “normal”, explore this summer!
The faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of New Mexico would like to offer to all New Mexicans thoughts, ideas, and resources from ourselves and our areas of study and work -- counseling, educational psychology, family & child studies, and nutrition -- to enlighten, soften, and aid the COVID-19-related transitions. We intend to make this offering monthly, each with a theme relevant to our times. With informed reflection and action throughout this time, we can all improve our Wellbeing at School and at Home in New Mexico.

All issues of WASH NM are available in pdf format at: http://coehs.unm.edu/departments-programs/ifce/wash-nm.html

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The department houses four diverse, but interconnected, programs that prepare students to address the myriad issues faced by the State of New Mexico. Our faculty members are leaders in their disciplines of Counselor Education, Educational Psychology, Family and Child Studies, and Nutrition; although each of these programs reflect different professional fields and identities, we all have shared values of human development, diversity, and excellence in scholarship and teaching. We offer various Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral Degrees and a number of programs have achieved national accreditations in their fields, a true marker of success and innovation.

ifce@unm.edu
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