

## Parenting in a Pandemic

Much of my career as an educator has been focused on supporting young people- many who have experienced isolation and trauma- to develop skills to survive and thrive. In alignment, our practices at Seeds of Solidarity Farm and Education Center in Orange focus on and teach ways to cultivate resilience. This is put to practice through our farming methods that honor the living ecosystem, as well as programs that seek to transform injustice while reconnecting people to their sources of sustenance and a sense of mutuality. At this time, the question of how to approach uncertainty with resilience is heightened; it is newer for some, and deeply familiar to many who have faced it every day of their lives. The experience of this pandemic will have a lasting impact on many young people. In the best of scenarios, they will develop meaningful tools for resilience for times of crisis, that are valuable for all times. This is a vital opportunity to revive and practice activities and ways of being that strengthen bodies, minds and hearts. Whether guided by a parent, caregiver, or trusted friend—the ideas offered here require little or no cost, consider a range of diverse learning styles and abilities, and include those for home and outdoors. A wonderful gift we can give children and youth right now is a tool-box of strategies for wellbeing and creativity as well as a deeper connection to nature and to each other, that they can carry forward well beyond these times.

**Grow Something:** You can do this inside right now—sunflower seeds (in their shells, raw), or snap pea seeds left from last year will grow quickly in some soil in a pot or milk container with holes, on your windowsill or porch (bring in on cold nights). Snip and eat! If you have a space to garden—yard or containers--start seeds inside, and plant spinach, lettuce, peas, carrots, radishes as soon as the ground thaws.

**Breathe in Nature:** Start your day with fresh air and ideally a short walk. Or open a window, step out the door and take a deep inhalation. Take advantage of the parks and trails, many accessible, that we are lucky to have throughout Franklin County and the North Quabbin. Explore one you have not before. Many kids have never climbed and sat in the low branches of a tree, teach them to do so safely. Bundle up and step outside each night to look at the sky, and contemplate the wonderous vastness of which we are a part.

**Gather Inspiration:** Collect [or make up] affirming poems or quotes (look up, for example, famous quotes on courage, or kindness). Print or write them out and take turns reading one aloud before meals, or upon awakening. Keep favorite quotes on slips of paper in a jar and you'll have them for the future! And in the future, making a jar of these to share with others is a great gift.

**Cook and Prepare Nourishing Food:** Vegetable soup is a great one, as each person has a chopping role. Bake from scratch. Prepare something from your cultural tradition, and those of others. If young people learn three new nourishing, economical dishes to make, they may have them for life. The needs of agencies who prepare and distribute food to those hungry are current and will continue. Support now and beyond as they advise.

**Calm Naturally:** Have a daily tea time with herbal teas that are nourishing and calming. Buy them from your food co-op. Create different blends. Nettles, oatstraw, chamomile, and lavender are among those you might try.

**Create:** Endless possibilities! Sharpen a pencil and sketch what you see, inside or outside, no self-critique. Make bright sidewalk chalk art to enjoy and leave for others. Create outdoor weavings with branches and twine, woven with strips of cloth, yarn, and grasses. Learn/teach to sew hems and buttons.

**Celebrate Words and Story:** Read a lot, read to each other. Tell a round robin story where one person starts a line and each adds one in turn. Make them as fun and outlandish as possible (not scary or violent). Write a letter or card to someone you care about, decorate the envelope, and send it. Learn a few phrases in a language new to you (thank you, please, goodnight, etc..) and practice in daily conversation. Sing!

**Move your Body** (and lymph system!): Stretch, play outside, or dance together to favorite songs. My friend told me her high-school aged teenager, a dancer, was missing her classes, so she suggested she and her friends find a park or field to dance in together, which elicited the 'yeah right mom' look and then...they did it!

**Feel and Release:** Whether these are familiar or new, feel those feeling of grief, fear, sadness, but practice letting these feelings wash over you and down the drain, or blow by you like dandelion seeds, or brush them away like a mosquito before it bites you, not sticking to you. There are many meditation practices (Mindfulness, Loving Kindness meditation to name two) that can be explored to find the one that is right for you, if you do not already have one.

**Practice Media Literacy:** Isolation and fear provides the temptation for even more screen time than usual. What a powerful time to teach and learn about accessing reputable and science-based sources for information, and being discerning about how and what to take in, and when. Look to global examples of compassion in action.

Carry on with love. May we emerge stronger and use the deepened sense of interconnectedness for the greater good.

Deb Habib, Ed.D is a parent and educator, using this time of uncertainty and pause to practice much of what she offers here. She and her husband, Ricky Baruch, are founders of Seeds of Solidarity in Orange, MA ([www.seedsofsolidarity.org](http://www.seedsofsolidarity.org)). They are the authors of *Making Love While Farming: A Field Guide to a Life of Passion and Purpose* (Levellers Press, 2019)