

COVID-19: Compassion in Action



So much has
changed. So should
our expectations.



One sure way to fall into compassion fatigue — for ourselves and others — is to have unrealistic expectations. Our expectations can set us up for growth, joy and adventure, or for disappointment and sorrow.

Our worlds have been turned upside down by the closures and social distancing that are necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During this unusual time in our lives, when so much has changed, our expectations for ourselves and our families need to adjust too.

It is not surprising that many of us are losing sleep over how to achieve what we were striving for just a week or two ago. So much is on hold. Even our expectations around caring for physical and emotional wellbeing of ourselves and those we love can be set too high. Checking in to be sure our expectations are realistic will help us through this difficult time.

As referenced in the [Compassion Resilience Toolkit](#), unrealistic expectations can create negative feelings when our goals seem constantly out of reach. We can end up feeling like we are not “good enough.” Practice setting expectations that are helpful and achievable. What sorts of expectations can support our wellbeing and will help us get through the challenges of this time? Ones that...

- Are focused on the present
- Are within our control
- Can serve as a guide to daily living reflecting how we want to live and act in the world
- Are reasonable, practical, and achievable.

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A mom who has explored the compassion toolkit in depth says:

"Like a lot of families, when our schools closed I was swept up in worries about maintaining a solid academic routine and keeping up. But with everything that's going on, my kids and I were too stressed out to make that work. I quickly decided to adjust my expectations and focus more on our emotional needs. I still expect the kids to do some schoolwork as the days pass, but we are being very flexible to make time for connection and relaxation and outdoor play. They'll have plenty of time to catch up when schools reopen and we're back to a more regular routine. For now, I'm squeezing my loved ones a little closer, and worrying less about things like academic success. We're actually enjoying our time together while we're stuck at home."

Meeting our own expectations about how we want to treat our family members can be really hard when we're

spending so much time together at home! We can feel trapped and overwhelmed. These unusual circumstances may call for changing our expectations for our own behavior, including practicing some "radical self-acceptance" — accepting our own humanity, including our failings, without shame or blame, so that we have the resilience to pick up the pieces and try again later. As our mom says:

"One of my biggest goals in the coming month is just to practice self-forgiveness at the end of each day, recognizing that this is a very scary and exhausting situation we all find ourselves in. I'm going to try not to yell at the kids or say angry words. But if I do, I plan to give myself some grace. I'm human, and I can't expect myself to be a perfect mom, especially in these tough times. My kids need me to accept them the same way, and to give them lots of grace and connection as we wait out COVID-19."

Let's join this mom in shifting our expectations and give ourselves and those around us a little more grace.

