

Thriving in the New Normal: How COVID-19 has Affected Neurodivers, Alternative Learners and Their Families and Implementing Effective, Creative Therapeutic Interventions to Support and Assist them

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ABSTRACT

COVID shelter-in-place directives have increased stress for many families. But for families of kids who are Neurodiverse, alternative learners--those with ADHD, ASD and LD--the negative impact has been more severe. Already struggling to manage emotions, begin and finish home and school tasks and maintain social connections, these kids have lost critical in-person academic, therapeutic and peer support systems. Meanwhile, tension at home has increased as parents, untrained in special education and often dealing with their own attention and learning challenges, have to deal with work, financial and housing responsibilities while tutoring their children without necessary training. Arguments about the overuse of screens, unfinished assignments, incomplete chores and following social distancing measures add to typical issues related to child development and power dynamics. Increased anxiety, higher levels of reactivity and persistent disappointment further complicate family relationships. Interventions to help families of Neurodiverse children and teens are most effective when they rely on the 5C's method of successful ADHD parenting--self-Control, Compassion, Collaboration, Consistency and Celebration. Working together for effective solutions based on meaningful incentives reduces family conflict, improves kids' participation and fosters parent-child cooperation. When therapists apply this model and assist families in using it, they strengthen emotional attunement and shift the family narrative away from problem-saturated thinking. This is more important now during COVID than ever before. Kids with ADHD, LD and ASD especially need affirmation about the positive steps they are making in their lives--whether the topic is school, life at home or peer relationships. This article will describe the particular COVID-related challenges for families of Neurodiverse, alternative learners and offer therapists practical tools to address them in their work. Clinical examples will support the implementation and efficacy of this model.

Keywords: Stress, COVID, Neurodiversity, Parenting stress

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