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## The Day We Distanced: Support in the Age of COVID-19

Support in the Age of COVID-19 should really start with empathy and validation.

Our empathy should focus on those that have been directly affected by the Coronavirus. We should empathize for the sacrifices of our healthcare workers, grocers, and cargo deliverers out there.

We should validate what we're all really experiencing. It feels like COVID-19 is about loss. When we consider loss, models like Kübler-Ross' Grief Cycle can come in handy.

Denial and anger seem to come first as information and communication are disseminated.

Depression seems to come next, requiring a lot of emotional support to bounce back.

Interestingly, when we receive emotional support, we begin to bargain with the world, tell our story, and reach out again.

Kübler-Ross' cycle ends in acceptance with a new plan in place to help us move on.

We're here to help with your plans in moving on.

Team Totem



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Supports in the age of COVID-19 really does come down to parent support and outreach. Dr. Springer discusses the arch nemesis of parenting: The Guilt Toxin.



## MESSAGE FROM BEN

# The Guilt Toxin: Parenting the Age of COVID-19

by Ben Springer, Ph.D., NCSP

As I sit to write this message, we've endured 16 days (or so) of the official COVID-19 school closures. In my role as manager for Totem PD, we've seen a dramatic increase in our online course completions, (like 913% increase). The dedication to learning and work of educators always warms my heart.

In my role as a director of special education, the first week of the closure was full of stress and anxiety. The second week of the closure was full of awe as I witnessed (remotely) administrators, special educators, and related service providers jump into action like an online army of special forces.

In my role as a father, the first week, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed working from home. I thoroughly enjoyed "taking 5" with my kids, eating lunch with them, and watching what they were learning from their teachers online. My wife and I laughed (and despaired) at how bad we are at teaching our own kids and then, it happened:

Guilt crept into our veins and our brains.

*"You aren't good at this. Your kids are going to fall behind. Why don't you know more about grammar and syntax? Why is a basic schedule so hard for you to implement? You can't even get your 2nd grader to sit and attend to a single thing at home."*

Every shameful thought that crept in had the old, familiar sting of the Guilt Toxin. The toxin shames parents into submission rapidly. Oddly, this isn't even the most harmful effect of the Guilt Toxin. Once parents submit to the shame, they attempt to counter the shame by overcompensating and actually become more indulgent and permissive with their children.

This where the Guilt Toxin takes control.

The more indulgent and permissive we become with our children, the worse our parenting gets, which (painfully) leads to more shame and the cycle just goes on and on. Our children become conflicted because on one side, they enjoy the indulgence and permissiveness, but on the other, they are desperately craving structure and routine.

So now what? What do we do when the Guilt Toxin has crept into our lives? We should all be very interested in the answer to this dilemma because this school closure business isn't going anywhere soon. While teachers can keep teaching and doctors can keep doctoring, parents cannot keep parenting without some sort of guidance.



## MESSAGE FROM BEN (CONT'D):

So, what is the antidote to the Guilt Toxin? These 5 points will help. Please share with every parent you know!

- Be able to recognize when thoughts of guilt are about ready to turn into feelings of shame. Be cognizant that while we may not be able to deflect the thought of guilt, we certainly can deflect the feeling of shame. Interrupt the the thought-to-feeling chain reaction with a simple mantra "I am still learning." Tackle parenting in the age of COVID-19 as a student--not an expert.
- Take comfort that EVERY parent is struggling through this experience (and will continue to struggle). We're all in this together and if you think anybody has this figured out--that's the Guilt Toxin talking. Nobody does, and you can quote me on that.
- Avoid indulgences and permissiveness, but don't avoid compassion and love with your children. Every kid just wants to be heard and understood on a consistent basis. That's about all we need to do as parents. Yeah, we can stumble through attempting to be a co-teacher with our online supports, but that's a side gig at best.
- Find a time to share the shame with somebody--and laugh about it. Inevitably, we're all going to feel a significant amount of ineptitude both as parents and online facilitators of makeshift education. Share your experiences as much as you can with somebody. Write it down if you can't share, but the idea is to get it out of your system.
- Don't give up on that structure and routine. It's gonna be hard. There's gonna be days where you just can't make it happen (and that's okay), but keep shooting for it. The funny thing about structure and routine, is they actually take time to create. Simply writing a schedule down does not a schedule make! Schedules are created by adhering to them and correcting errors that interrupt the schedule with patience and compassion.

It is my sincere hope this 5-point-Antidote helps you all combat the Guilt Toxin. Parents are most susceptible right now, but so is everybody else. Fight the toxin to fight the virus.