

Community Feedback / Parent Testimony

1. How has COVID-19 negatively impacted your mental health as a parent?

The covid-19 pandemic has affected nearly every aspect of my life. I would say the area that it has affected the most would be the added stress on me as a mother. In the early days and weeks of the pandemic last spring it almost seemed as if it was something that was not going to affect our family. In the beginning I had thought it would be something that would affect extremely highly populated urban areas. When our family first learned that spring break would be extended by week we were a little bit excited. As one week quickly turned into two and then three weeks, the reality that my daughter would not be returning to her classroom set in and our optimism quickly began to fade. With school out of session my already expensive child care costs nearly doubled. Then about six weeks into the shutdown my childcare provider opted to close down her home-based daycare to care for her own parents who were sick, this left me completely without child care. Finding child care where you feel confident your kids will be safe is challenging, even under the best circumstances, trying to find full-time childcare during a pandemic was awful! Even close friends and neighbors who, in the past, would have been willing to help me were now unwilling due to their fears of the virus. As a family, my children and I enjoy being outdoors and among friends. During the shutdown it was very difficult on us. Being home without the ability to leave was extremely challenging for myself and my kids. I felt extremely isolated even though I was never alone, my kids were always present.

2. How did you realize your mental health was being affected? Was there a defining moment or did it happen over time?

Many days I felt fatigued and exhausted and I noticed a familiar discomfort in my chest, the same discomfort I experienced with anxiety while I was going through my divorce. I also began to experience familiar feelings that I experienced during bouts of clinical depression. I also noticed I was constantly yelling at my children. Then my daughter broke down. She began to cry. She was sobbing and saying that lately all I do is scream at her and her brother. This absolutely broke my heart. Something had to change.

3. What coping techniques, methods of recharging, and/or resources did you find helpful in dealing with the added stressors the COVID-19 pandemic has caused you as a parent?

Soon after I realized how stressed my family and I had become, I knew something had to change. It had become clear that this pandemic was only getting worse and it was not going away anytime soon. I tried to go through life with an optimistic perspective. Our family enjoys the outdoors and our mantra is "nothing goes wrong while camping, it's always an adventure!". I decided it was time to change the way we were handling our situation. Since Texas State Parks had closed, we decided to take advantage of the wooded area and pond behind our apartment home, we would make our own adventure. Getting outside to explore helped return a sense of normalcy to our family. I'm also grateful for some amazing resources that were available for me from my employer. My employer offered a deeply discounted program through a local daycare. When my discounted days of child care ended, my employer then awarded me with a generous grant from their "Covid-19 Fund" to help cover some of my costly child care bills.

4. Reflecting on your personal experience, is there a message of hope you'd like to share with your fellow community members?

Dealing with the covid-19 pandemic has been a huge burden on me and my family. With that said I'm thankful that, thus far, we have not been infected with this awful virus. Each day I go to work I care for patients who are fighting for their life due to this virus, some of which are in the same age group as myself. It serves as a daily reminder that inconveniences such as not going to the mall to leisurely shop or not going to a backyard celebration, or canceling vacations or school, are all only minor setbacks when put into perspective. At least for now, myself and my children have our health. We will continue to practice social distancing in the way of avoiding unnecessary crowds and good hand hygiene.

Note from Parent: "I would like to share with you that I'm a divorced single mother of two young children, a boy who is 6 years old and just entered kindergarten and a girl who is almost 8 years old and is in second grade. In addition I'm also a healthcare worker providing care in the Intensive Care Unit of an area hospital with patients who are infected with the Sars Covid-19 virus"