

ADVICE SCIENCE & WELLNESS

5 Ways To Bring Positivity Into Your Family's Life During Post-Election Stress and Instability

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The past couple of days since the election have been extremely difficult for me. My head is spinning with questions and concerns, and I have already gone through the stages of both depression and anger.

Like any tragic event in our lives, we must process the multitude of emotions and try our best to find something positive in these challenging, painful times.

Politics aside, the part that hurts the most is that kindness did not prevail. As a mother, I must find the strength to pull myself together and focus on raising kind, respectful, loving, hopeful children that this country and the world needs to move forward.

Where do we start? I searched deep, only to come back to the basics of positive psychology. The science points to several ways that we can focus our energy – even our anger and despair – in a more constructive way in order to build stronger relationships with loved ones and our fellow community members, and to find creative solutions to address the complex issues we face.

Here are five activities that you can do with your children to feel more optimistic together:

Be playful

It is so hard to stop reading all the news stories right now, but we will all certainly feel better if we take a break to play and laugh with our children. Dress up in goofy costumes, read a joke book, play a fun game like charades, watch a comedy on television, or sing silly songs.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), laughing improves our body and mind, and is one of the simplest tools we have for reducing stress and anxiety. When we laugh, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex of our brain is activated, resulting in the release of the feel-good hormones called endorphins. These chemicals create feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, and also relieve pain.

In addition, the level of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline), and dopamine are lowered. Laughing also relaxes our muscles, which soothes tension from stress, and engages the limbic system – the part of the brain that manages our mood and emotions.

Laughing offers a healthy distraction from negative emotions like anger, guilt, and stress, giving us a more lighthearted perspective when faced with challenges. When you enjoy a good laugh with your kids, you create a happier, more positive atmosphere.

Get creative

I sat and colored with my daughter after school, which was an incredible distraction from the news. Art has been scientifically proven to reduce stress levels, so much so, that an entire discipline of art therapy has been developed. Art is a way of tapping into the right side of the brain where creativity, intuition, visualization, emotions, and daydreaming stem from.

Creativity distracts from what is tormenting our minds, giving us a great way to focus on something more positive, productive, and inspiring. When we are creative, we experience a sense of flow and become completely absorbed in what we are doing to the point of being in a near meditative state. When we are in a state of flow, we forget about all of our thoughts and lose track of time. Additionally, working with certain [colors](#) can boost our mood.

There are endless ways to share creative time with your children:

Sing or play music together

Write a story or poem

Paint, draw, or mold a sculpture

Dance to some lively music

Cook or bake together in the kitchen

Give thanks

It's especially when times are tough that we really need to stop and express gratitude for the good in our lives. Dr. Robert Emmons, the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, encourages people to practice gratitude because it's been proven to make us feel more optimistic. It also helps us cope with stress more effectively and recover more quickly from traumatic situations.

Focusing on the positive in our lives boosts our body, mind, and spirit. It gives us energy, inspires us, transforms us, and helps us think about life as a gift. Spend some time with your children these next few weeks pointing out the parts of life for which you are grateful. There are many [creative ways](#) to encourage your children to express gratitude: Keep a gratitude journal or add a gratitude moment or prayer to their bedtime routine.

Exercise

Exercise is so critical to calming our bodies and minds. I emerged from a day staring at the post-election news by taking my daughter for a walk around our neighborhood. Getting fresh air and being active really improved my mood.

According to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#), aerobic exercise is a vital tool for reducing stress. It decreases overall levels of tension, elevates and stabilizes mood, improves sleep, and lifts self-esteem. Even just five minutes of physical activity can help relax us. This happens because exercise produces endorphins, the chemicals in our brain that act as natural painkillers and make us feel happier and less anxious.

During stressful times, look for ways to be active with your children. Go on a family hike or bike ride, have a catch in the backyard, go swimming, or play fun games like hopscotch, jump rope, tag, or freeze dance.

Help others

All the experts tell us that one of the best things you can do when you feel down is to help someone else. When we make others happy, we experience an amazing biological phenomenon called a helper's high. According to [Psychology Today](#), the helper's high is a literal "high," similar to a drug-induced high. Doing good deeds triggers the reward center in our brain that is responsible for releasing endorphins that make us feel elated and excited naturally.

One way that my family will create positive energy is by participating in a large community service event where children and parents work together on projects aimed to benefit different groups in need – from soldiers overseas to underprivileged and special needs children to the elderly.

Explore these [ideas](#) to make kindness a family affair in your community. And share the tools you're using to help your children overcome adversity and challenges.

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Great ideas. Distraction would have been nice on the 9th. My poor kid covered his ears because he didn't want to hear the news playing any more.

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