



Fwd: The Kids Are Cracking

1 message

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BREEDER'S DIGEST

by **Fatherly**

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The Kids Are Acting Out During Quarantine Edition

Recently, we spoke to fathers about their [quarantine breaking point](#). One dad told us he was driven to near-madness by hearing the Daniel Tiger “Ugga Mugga” song. Another admitted to stepping on a Beyblade and swearing in front of his kids.

It’s getting to little kids too — maybe even more so. Instead of saying (or thinking), “Oh, man, I’m feeling pretty turned around right now,” they scream, cry, and protest their bedtimes. It’s easy to understand why: Routine is the axis upon which children’s worlds spin. When the axis tilts, issues arise.

Some behaviors may point to an [anxiety disorder](#), but in most cases, all that’s needed from a parent is some reassurance. That’s understandable. That’s what Beyblade dad needed too. He just wasn’t asking for it nicely.

JOKE OF THE WEEK:

Why do plants hate math?*



BOTHER/DON'T BOTHER

Bother: Mölkky

A mash-up of cornhole and bowling, [Mölkky](#) is a Finnish lawn game worthy of a place in your outdoor games rotation. Twelve slim, numbered pins or “skittles” are set up on the grass. Teams of players take turns throwing a wooden block, or *karttus*, at the pins in an attempt to knock them down. The team who is first to knock down 50 points worth of pins wins. Mölkky is best summed up as “throwing one thing at another group of other things.” What’s more fun than that?

Don’t Bother: Horseshoes

Horseshoes sounds great. But to play horseshoes correctly, you need upward of 50 pounds of equipment, a huge yard, and two sand pits. Even if you can play the game correctly, flung horseshoes are hell on yards, making more divots than a beginner at Pebble Beach. It’s not worth the hassle.

Knee-High Anxiety

Whether because they remain in lockdown or simply because schedules have shifted, [COVID-19](#) has kids doing what kids do, crying for help in the most in-your-face way possible. [Regressions](#), [tantrums](#), and acting-out are normal parts of childhood and can be expected to ramp up during periods of change and stress. They can also be a clue that your child has an anxiety disorder. Here’s how to tell the difference — and to work them through a troubling time, no matter their reaction.

Sleep Regression/Bedwetting

Under stress, your child may act as if they’ve taken a few steps backward in their development, most notably in how they’re sleeping. “Kids are struggling with things they had previously mastered,” says Lindsey Giller, a clinical psychologist in the Mood Disorders Center at the [Child Mind Institute](#). These regressions can happen during major life changes, such as bringing a baby sibling home from the hospital — or social distancing because of COVID-19.

What Parents Can Do: Send the kids to bed at the same time every night, and have them stick to a schedule for other nightly activities, such as

changing into pajamas and brushing teeth. If helpful, draw the step of the routine out on flashcards and have them put the cards into an envelope as they finish their nightly tasks.

If [bedwetting](#) is the issue, don't scold. Continue to help them as normal, such as by using an alarm to wake them up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. Reward your kid when they get through the night without an accident, but don't give them too much attention when they slip up.

Tantrums

Minor inconveniences your child used to ignore can spark a tantrum under stressful conditions. "Right now, everyone's baseline anxiety is raised," Giller says. Children's ability to cope with slight changes in their routine can vanish with extra anxiety, and any little mishap can trigger an outburst. This bad behavior isn't intentional. It's a natural response for kids to show you they're struggling.

What Parents Can Do: Usually the best course of action is to ignore the tantrum. Once it starts, there's not much you can do to stop it, though you can try getting low and close and talking through their emotions. After the tantrum passes, make sure your kid follows through on the task that sparked the tantrum, such as getting changed. As they recover, give plenty of hugs and reassurances.

Constant Crying

"Kids are responding to their experience of stress and anxiety," Giller says. "They're not sure how to deal with it in a different way, so they're falling apart." If your kid won't stop crying, first identify what's causing their tears. Crying can be a sign that something is seriously wrong, such as an injury or sickness.

What Parents Can Do: If your kid isn't in physical pain, then help them put a name to the emotions they're feeling. Once you know what's on their mind (this might not come with the first few sets of tears), reassure your child that it's okay to feel sad or upset or angry. Form a plan together to make them feel better, such as going on a walk or creating art to express their emotions. And if they're crying over little things, don't swoop in and fix the problem. Crying can simply lead to more crying.

Yelling and Defiance

What looks like defiant behavior may actually be a child's attempt to escape a situation because it causes them stress. Anxiety provokes a fight-or-flight response, and kids that choose "fight" may appear oppositional and aggressive. Yet yelling, hitting, and other anger issues can be how a kid responds to feeling overwhelmed or being unable to control their emotions, according to the Child Mind Institute.

What Parents Can Do: Like other responses to anxiety, keeping a routine and discussing underlying feelings can calm these bad behaviors. In addition, point out silver linings to your kid's quarantine schedule, such as

being allowed more screen time, to keep them feeling positive. If your child is still on edge, have them try breathing exercises and practice [mindfulness](#) to ground them in the moment.

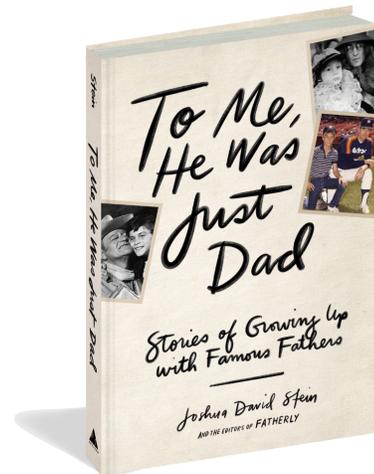
Withdrawal

One of the clearest signs your kid has a serious anxiety issue, Giller says, is withdrawal. Pulling back in this way may mean a child stops communicating with a person they have a strong relationship with or doesn't participate in activities they previously liked to do.

What Parents Can Do: To deal with a child's retreat, try coaxing them out of their shell. Opening up about your own feelings can encourage them to do the same. If they stay withdrawn, it could be worth reaching out to a professional.

We Wrote a Book!!!

To Me, He Was Just Dad, *Fatherly's* first book, is a collection of 40 personal essays by the children of famous and notorious fathers. Featuring intimate glimpses into the family lives of legends like Bruce Lee, Jeff Bridges, Christopher Reeve, Pablo Escobar, and Samuel L. Jackson, *To Me, He Was Just Dad* offers a layered portrait of fatherhood, the calling that eclipses even the grandest ambitions. Sentimental? Sure, but also brutally honest and profound.



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Brief Interviews With Very Good Dads

Fatherly: How's the quarantine going for your family?

Ben Falcone: We're a pretty optimistic bunch around here. The girls clearly miss their friends a lot, and Zoom just doesn't do it. But with that said, to get to spend so much time with them and to get the story out of them that they probably wouldn't have told you — you hear things that are just so funny and so great and so indicative of their character and who they are right now. I mean, if there are any positives to come out of this whole pandemic, it's getting to spend that quality time with your kids.

PUNCHLINE OF THE WEEK:

** It gives them square roots.*

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