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How can we reduce ACEs and toxic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic? Many of us are concerned that increased stress might increase the risk for ACEs. For example, most child abuse happens when adults reach their breaking point. However, we are not powerless in the face of these challenges. Using HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) as a guide, here are 10 suggestions to reduce ACEs now:

1. Think about **social connection and physical distance, not social distance**. Continuing to nurture close relationships with friends and relatives protect against ACEs.
2. **Talk with your children**. Like their parents, children may be fearful, or simply missing their routines. Ask them about their concerns. Their answers will guide you on how to talk with them. Reassure them: although this is serious, they and their parents will live through it.
3. **Reach out for support**, particularly if you have an infant at home. Infants exhaust and frustrate their parents. These feelings drive some parents to hurt their infants, making the first six months the most dangerous age for child abuse. If you have a baby in your home, expect these normal feelings. If your baby won't stop crying, and it's getting to you, put the baby down, and gather yourself. Maybe call a friend, put on headphones, and wait it out.
4. **Reach out to support**. Reach out to your friends or relatives with infants at home. Try to listen without offering advice – a sympathetic ear can do miracles.
5. **Address concrete family needs**. Shelter-in-place orders may lead to families struggling to meet basic needs. Offer to help by getting diapers for families that need them, cook a meal, or drop off food. Be on the lookout for families who have trouble getting food. If you can, contribute to local relief efforts.

6. **Address parental mental health needs.** Depression is common and treatable. Those with a history of depression, parents with newborns, and people who have lost their jobs are at particular risk. Recognize common signs of depression: anger and irritability, loss of energy, loss of interest in daily activities, and feeling helpless and hopeless. If you are concerned, reach out for help. Family doctors, pediatricians, and obstetricians are well trained in recognizing and treating signs of depression.
7. **Check in with the children in your life.** Schoolteachers and early childhood educators can recognize signs of abuse or neglect. Children who are out of sight because their schools are closed are more vulnerable.
8. **Be on the lookout for family violence.** Many professionals expect an increase in family violence due to changes in routines, economic stress, and simply being cooped up in tight quarters together. Reach out to the National Domestic Violence hotline (800-799-7233) for advice. If there is a gun in your home, this may be a particularly dangerous time.
9. **Engage with your community, in whatever ways are possible.** Your local, state, and federal government are mobilizing support. Decision-makers need to hear from all of us about strengthening social safety nets. Helping others gives us (and older children and teens) a sense of purpose that can help counter stress.
10. **Create positive moments.** Go for walks, play games, cook or bake something together. Many families are growing closer as we face this crisis together. Look for those moments that will create happy memories, even now.

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