

The Best Laid Plans

5/12/2020

It's almost mid-May. Normally, kids all over the country would be well into their last-day-of-school countdown. Families would normally be putting the finishing touches on their summer vacation plans and locking in their kids' final summer camp plans. But we aren't dealing with normal right now. And we aren't quite sure when life will be back to normal again. In addition to wreaking havoc on the health, economy and education of our world, COVID-19 has really put the future into question. There's a tremendous amount of uncertainty about how things will unfold in the coming weeks and months. It brings to mind that quote: "The best laid plans of mice and men go awry." The best laid plans of moms and dads, of kids, of college students...all the best laid summer plans have flown out the window. So...now what?

Sarah here. Like so many families out there, my family and I are knee deep in this "best laid plans" situation. That summer beach trip we planned for the week after school gets out...



The summer camp we've had lined up for months...



Now, don't get me wrong. These are *not* life and death issues. There are so many more serious things going on in the world right now. But, in our world and I'm guessing in yours, plans falling apart can certainly create a lot of stress, frustration, disappointment, tension and conflict.

When you've been looking forward to something and it falls through...it's crummy. Spring and Summer 2020 plans being called off is no one's fault. It is what it is. But, think about how upset *you* feel that things fell through. As an adult, you have age, wisdom, experience, maturity and higher-level cognitive functioning on your side. Now, try to imagine what that might be like for your kid(s). They're dealing with the same situations but with far fewer resources. So, yeah...it may get ugly when you break the news that the big summer vacation has been cancelled.



There isn't a perfect way to talk with your kid(s) about massive changes to summer plans. But there are some things that might make it go a little more smoothly.

- DO talk with your partner about summer plans before talking with the kid(s). If some plans are still up in the air, discuss where you stand, what you're comfortable with and what makes sense for your family. If plans have fallen through, think about how to tell the kids.
- DO talk with your partner about whether there are any alternative plans that can be put in place. Maybe the summer camp they've been looking forward to has been cancelled. But there may be other options available...even if they aren't a perfect match for their interests or your schedule. In this case, something is better than nothing. Likewise, the big vacation may have been called off, but perhaps there are things closer to home you and your family could safely do. Even if it's camping in the backyard or taking a virtual trip to the Smithsonian.

- DO have backup plans fleshed out before talking with your kid(s), if possible. Think through how your kid(s) may react to this disappointing news. If nothing else, thinking things through and knowing possible alternatives (Plan B or C or D...) may help you remain calm and composed, even if your kid(s) freak out.



- DO be honest with your kid(s) about your feelings to the extent it's developmentally appropriate. It's okay for them to know you're disappointed and upset too! Being stoic may send the message that you are unaffected or don't care.
- DO remember that your kid(s) are kids. Don't take it personally if they get upset. Work on perspective taking. Think about how *their* lives have been changed...they don't get to go to school or hang out with friends, you're teaching them and have been their main social outlet...and now, the plans they've been looking forward to have fallen apart.

This is a challenging situation but remember that you aren't the only one going through it. It doesn't necessarily make everything better, but it may feel a little easier to seek social support from family, friends, neighbors and coworkers if you realize that they're probably dealing with the same things. It's okay to feel flustered or upset or disappointed that plans have fallen through. So, even though you may feel bad or guilty about your kids being upset, remember that it's not your fault. It's not anyone's fault. When best laid plans go awry, have compassion for your family and for yourself. Model perspective taking and cognitive flexibility. And, know that at some point, things will get better.