

What Are We Teaching?

As I write this, we are on day 13 of a currently scheduled 23-day “shelter in place” for the state of Illinois. Will that be extended? Well, only time will tell. We’ve learned not to be surprised by changes that have been a seemingly daily announcement from our governor.

COVID-19 has been on the news, on our social media feeds, at the top of discussions for weeks. It has gone from a “meme” of overreaction and toilet-paper hoarding to a very real issue facing our country and our world.

Our reactions

Parents across the country have become work-from-home homeschool teachers overnight. Teachers are learning how to teach virtually, in a variety of ways. And they’ve risen to the challenge, learning to adapt their teaching styles overnight.

And events. Oh, how the events of our lives have changed. I went from being an overwhelmed, stretched-thin mom with active children’s schedules pulling me in 10 different directions each day to having a completely clear schedule. Absolutely nothing scheduled. Nothing. It’s been eerie and somewhat refreshing, all at once.

And, yes, the anxiety has been high. I’ve been faced with several extremely tough decisions in my life, and we’ve encountered a great deal of stress from major life changes and loss.

But the anxiety in this situation is different. I believe it’s just the fear of the unknown and the feeling of complete helplessness in certain situations. I am responsible for the care of my nearly 94-year-old grandma, who is in an assisted-living facility in our hometown. I haven’t been able to go into the facility to see her for nearly two weeks. Yes, the staff

are protecting the residents, and for that I’m beyond grateful. But I also can’t be there, in person, for one of the people who needs me most. And that’s heartbreaking.

I haven’t slept well in 13 nights. Either I can’t fall asleep to begin with, or when I do, terrible dreams startle me awake. I’m not a worrier by nature. So, this unease is foreign territory to me.

However, a quote I read really stuck out to me when this journey began. It was something along the lines of, “Our children are learning how to live by watching how we, as parents, react. They’re learning how to respond to stress and adversity.”

Wow. That truly struck a chord with me. What are Craig and I teaching, as parents, in how to handle stress, worry and uncertainty?

Life at home

We’ve had many discussions, as a family, about the disappointments resulting from this time of “social distancing.” That, yes, it’s OK to be disappointed in not being able to attend your 8-year-old best friend’s sleepover right now. It’s absolutely understandable to be sad that we’ve had to cancel our spring break trip to Oklahoma to spend time with Uncle Willy and Aunt Tracie on their ranch.

However, we simply can’t park ourselves in that disappointment. We can make the choice to move forward to make the best of what we’re given in the moment.

Our 11-year-old, Nolan, has been able to spend hours each day with his show heifers in our barn — something he simply wouldn’t be able to do during this time of the year in any normal year. Can you imagine how tough the showmanship

competitions will be this summer with all of the work being done during this time at home? Today, he’s putting the finishing touches on a fort in our tree line. The kid is in his element, for sure.

Our 8-year-old, Caroline, is able to draw and paint and dance any time she chooses. And schoolwork is being done in short bursts in the comfort of her PJs. (We aren’t enforcing a dress code at “Lee Academy.”)

And our resident high schooler, Waylon? Well, he’s enjoying sleeping in and spending time “virtually” with his friends between some back-road driving lessons as part of his homeschool driver’s education.

We are cooking and baking as a family. We are cleaning the house as part of our “home economics,” which is not a family favorite, by the way. We have conducted a science fair and a writer’s showcase. And we’ve brought back the Wii for nightly family Mario Kart tournaments.

The other night, as Craig was saying the prayer before dinner, Nolan spoke up. “Can I say something, too? Thank you, God, for giving us so much family time right now. That’s definitely a good thing happening right now.” No, this world is not what any of us would desire. By the time of this magazine printing? Well, hopefully, things are looking much, much brighter. Regardless, now and in the future, we can make the best of any situation we are in. It’s all a matter of perspective. **HW**

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