



Is It Just Me, Or Do You Want To Punch Someone?

The me of Mid-March is long gone. Mid-March Julie took to the news of COVID-19 with gusto and determination. She brought outside activity to a halt, wiped things down, kept track of her cleaning ritual, constantly refreshed the daily Johns Hopkins virus map, listened to briefings from the White House, Cuomo, and Newsom, and segued to working via Zoom. Two months later, in her place is someone both more weary and more wary. I find the national news completely disheartening. Unlike every other major country, America seems to lack the will and leadership to get a handle on this thing. Instead they're opening malls again in places like Atlanta where clerks wear masks but patrons don't and one shopper quips, "[When you start seeing where the cases are coming from and the demographics – I'm not worried.](#)" I make a living by traveling to various places to talk about my books, but with my asthma and pre-diabetes (God I hope it's still just *pre*-diabetes) I can't imagine going back out there until this thing is gone or we have a reliable vaccine. Meantime, I want to find that feckless person in Atlanta and punch them.

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Many of us are experiencing increased anxiety and/or depression right now. The uncertainty around our own health and that of those we love is a concern. As is what will happen to all the important rituals and events we've been looking forward to, and what will happen to school and work, and our finances, and the economy, and all the people who have it worse than we do. All of this is fuel for anxiety's flame. Whatever our anxiety set point was prior to COVID-19, chances are good it's now burning hotter. *Oh yay.* Oh and, I could have set up a metaphor for depression, too, but frankly I don't have the energy.

What's worse, children and young adults may be hurting far more than we are. I know my two are having a rough go of it, at times. So, as much as I care about what we grownups are going through, the focus of this letter is about the mental health of our kids. If you have kids in your life (or know someone who does), here is some information that shines a light on

what kids experience, and how we can better help them. Gonna start with things that have nothing to do with the virus, because the issues we faced before are still with us, and still matter.

First up, what I feel is most urgent: [The Atlantic recently came out with this shattering article](#) on the role we parents play, however unwittingly, in increasing anxiety in our kids. The piece centers the work of Yale researcher Eli Lebowitz who has demonstrated that the things we do in an attempt to alleviate our kids' fears can actually exacerbate those fears and turn into clinical anxiety. Examples: your kid is scared of the dark/you ensure they're never in the dark. Your kid can't be alone/you ensure they are never alone. Your kid only eats pasta with butter and parmesan cheese/you always make them pasta with butter and parmesan cheese. (The latter stings; I did that!) Research shows that a kid whose environment was carefully curated for them has a hard time coping, and may have full-blown anxiety. If you're having some feelings as you read this, I encourage you to be curious about what that may be about. And please know you are not alone—this whole thing hits a little too close to home for me, frankly. But hey, if you've heard me give my parenting talk you know I'm not putting my head in the sand on this stuff any longer. And bottom line, this isn't about blame, it's about undoing harmful patterns and restoring good health and wellness in our children.

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Second, as I continue to work on my book for young adults I'm very interested in how "adulthood" (the ability to fend for yourself) requires agency (the belief that you can do the task in front of you) which if undermined causes anxiety (getting stuck in a worry about what might happen). I got to riff on the interrelatedness of these concepts with [Teru Clavel](#), author of [World Class: One Mother's Journey Halfway Around the Globe in Search of the Best Education For Her Children](#) in her video series "3Q". It's under fifteen minutes, and if you have young adult offspring at home with you right now I think you really might get something out of it. You can watch the full discussion [here](#).

And finally, here are three terrific recent articles that may be of use to you in supporting kids in this time of COVID-19.

- Here's a great piece with [specific tips on how to help kids from toddlers to teens](#) cope with the stress the virus is causing.
- This one is a [spotlight on what teens need in particular right now](#), courtesy of the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Those of you with more than one child know that sibling interaction is subject to unique twists thanks to the virus. [You can read more on that here](#).

Oh! One last thing: here's a **bonus link** just for you called ["10 Sneaky Ways Your Coronavirus Anxiety Is Coming Out."](#) It made me feel normal. And hey, that's a feeling I'm not taking for granted.

As ever, I want to hear from you. Let me know how you're doing and what came up for you in response to this letter.

xo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JULIE". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke that extends to the left and then curves down to form the letter. The letters "U", "L", "I", and "E" are in a simple, uppercase, sans-serif font.

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