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Vonda Jump Norman, an assistant professor of Social Work, helps 4-year-old grandson, Jaxon Malouf, with the springtime pastime of planting vegetables.

This isn't breaking news, but every one of us is feeling some tension, a lot of uncertainty.

And if you are, so are your kids or, sometimes, grandkids, in the case of Vonda Jump Norman, an assistant professor of Social Work.

This historical rough patch, however, may offer the opportunity of a lifetime to build memories. "This is an unprecedented opportunity that we may never have again," she said. "We all need to tell our stories and to be heard, and for our children to feel safe through our support. Those things, in and of themselves, create lasting effects of resiliency into adulthood."

This may be easier said than done, Jump Norman acknowledges. Kids are often loud, sometimes annoying, and they push our buttons. At times, she said, parents may not see that irritating behavior is a way of trying to catch their attention. Children will do whatever they need to get our attention, so if we give it to them for doing something positive, that is the best, but if they don't, they will resort to getting it for doing something negative.

The problem, she adds, is that kids themselves don't know how to ask for help. "Kids don't say, 'I need to talk to you because I'm scared' or 'I'm having a hard time,'" she said.

"We see it through their behavior, right? Sometimes it's because they need our attention — that's the number one reinforcement for most kids. So when we can give them our attention in a positive way, we can create more positive memories and more positive behaviors as well," she said.

"We can build great memories with our children if we can take a moment and look at what is happening through their eyes, and really try to understand what they are experiencing: we should be listening to them every day."

So, how to begin? First of all, just talk. Use simple words as you explain to your children why they are washing their hands so much or don't see their friends, said Jump Norman, who also directs the Trauma Resiliency Project at The Family Place, whose mission is to strengthen families and protect children. The Family Place has three locations: in Logan, Hyrum, and Smithfield.

She encourages parents to create a space where "kids feel safe to ask questions, to talk about their feelings and their uncertainties." Children, she adds, need acknowledgment from adults that they're loved and supported.

Also important is creating a routine, which is another safety net for children. She recommends creating a general schedule of what children will be doing throughout the day. We don't need to schedule certain times to do things, but just do them in a similar order throughout the day. "All of us feel safer when we have a predictable routine, when we know what to expect," she said. "And in these uncertain times, that's more important than ever."

The goal is to build resiliency and confidence in our children. But, she adds, "what we choose to focus on is what we get. This is a moment in our lives that will pass. When will we have the opportunity to be with our precious children every day again? Before you know it, they will be grown and out of your house, and you will be alone at home, wishing you had spent more time with them.

"We can choose to be thankful for the time and relationships we have, and we can express gratitude on a daily basis and focus on the things that are positive in our lives, no matter how hard things are. Be silly. Have fun and laugh every day!"

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