

What Families Can Do to Adjust to the Hudson Valley's New Normal

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Astor Services for Children & Families CEO Yvette Bairan shares how families can make the most of the challenging time.

The Hudson Valley is on the path to reopening.

Yet for families living in self-isolation in the region, life during the COVID-19 crisis isn't any easier. With a full reopening slated for early July at best, Hudson Valleyites are stuck living in closer quarters than ever before. It's a challenging time of life, and one that impacts adults and children alike. Plus, with many summer camps on hold for the season and schools implementing online formats, the next few months are looking quite a bit different from those sweet Hudson Valley summers of days past.

At Astor Services for Children & Families in Rhinebeck, CEO Yvette Bairan has seen these challenges firsthand. As a working mother who oversees the health and wellbeing for families across the Hudson Valley, she understands that increased time at home places strain on families in a number of ways.



CEO Yvette Bairan

The Challenges

“I think the biggest challenges for families now are the realities that children are not in school,” she says. “Having to do distance learning with children for those who do remote work or are essential workers...it presents a lot of stress and anxiety for families.”

For parents, the stress of balancing children’s needs with the demands of work and the weight of maintaining a sufficient income is very real. For children, meanwhile, the unexpected disruption in school and extracurricular routines prompts confusions and questions to which there is often no clear answer.

During this time of anxiety, the significance of mental and physical wellbeing, along with the resources to support them, becomes more crucial than ever. Recognizing this, Astor amped up its telemental health services to ensure that its clients have access to the resources they need. Since going mostly remote in mid-March, the organization has provided almost 20,000 telemental mental health services to clients.

“We’re happy because we know this is a very stressful time for families,” Bairan explains. “We’re getting them the services they need.”



Astor building in Rhinebeck

How to Cope

While life during the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, there are ways that families in the Hudson Valley can cope with the new normal. First up, Bairan notes, is accepting the fact that life as we know it will be undeniably different going forward. With a greater emphasis on self-care and social distancing, families need to think further ahead and remain conscious of wellbeing for both children and parents.

To do this, routine is key. Even though schedules are all over the place, Bairan recommends implementing some sort of regularity into day-to-day activities to promote connection and ease worries and fears.

“Families can try to maintain normal schedules by making sure kids are waking up at a certain time and going to bed at a certain time,” she says, adding that limits on social media and technology are also critical. Instead of allowing children unlimited access to tech, consider reading together or going on a walk instead. “Try to find outdoor activities that will still allow you to do the social distancing that you need to do.”



Children at an Astor cabaret show

Also essential for families is maintaining an open network of communication. As Bairan explains, children should feel comfortable discussing their feelings with parents, while parents should have appropriate conversations with their children about what's going on and what the changes mean for the family as a whole. While these conversations should be tailored to children's age levels and understanding, they should remain open and honest.

Along this vein, Bairan advises that parents keep in contact with their children's school districts so as to stay informed and provide children with the resources and support they need.

"One of the things that's been important for me is to continue to go to my son's school district website," she says. "Be informed about what the school's expectations and requirements are. Find out what [your child's] assignments are. The more you can talk to your kids about those routines, the better you're going to be."