



**CDMRP**  
 (COMMUNITY DISABILITY MANAGEMENT AND  
 REHABILITATION PROGRAMME)  
 (A joint project of Department of Psychology,  
 University of Calicut & Social Justice Department, Govt. of Kerala)

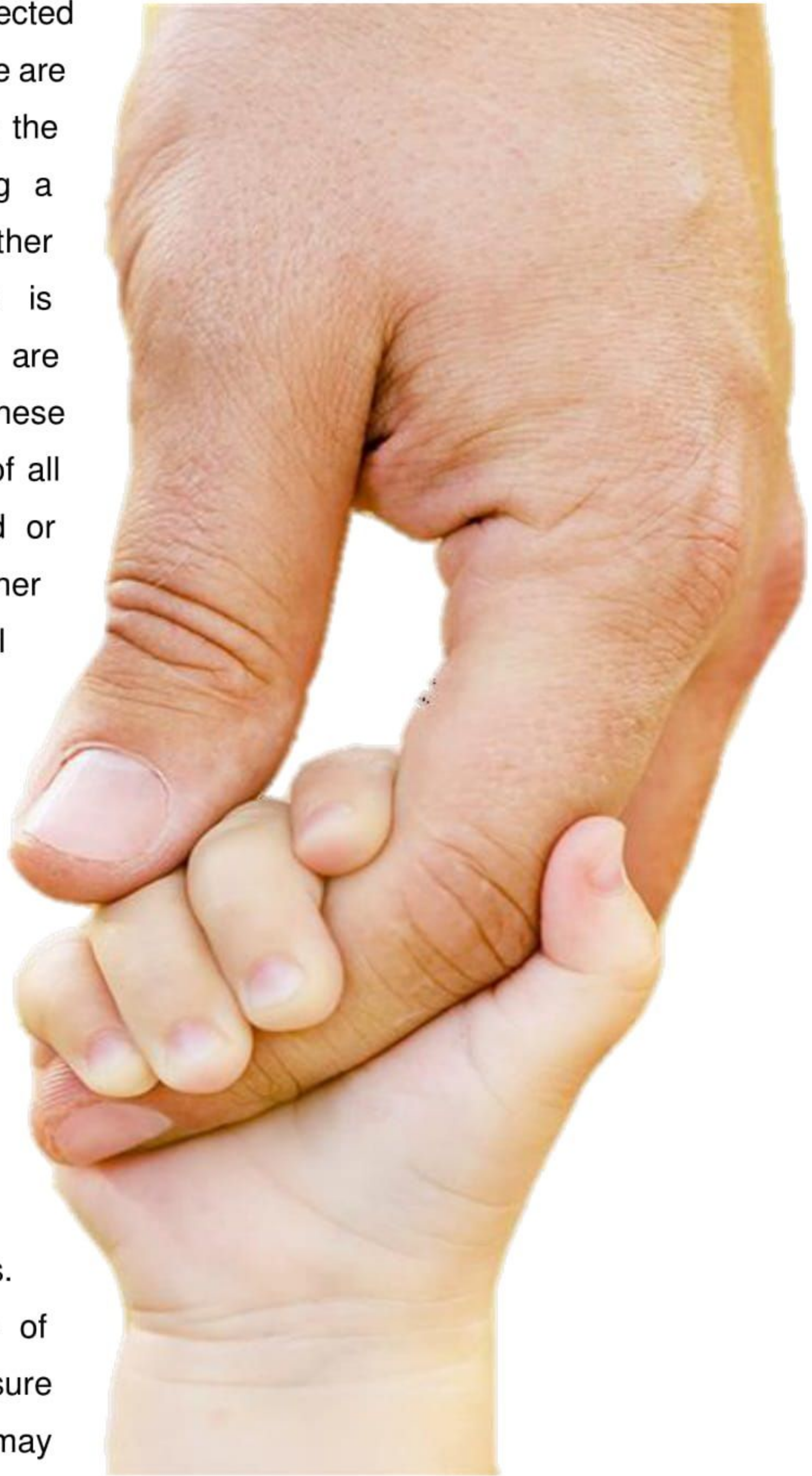


# LIFE AT THE TIME OF CORONA: A GUIDE TO PARENTS OF SPECIALLY ABLED CHILDREN



ENGLISH VERSION

**H**ow to spend an unexpected vacation is a question we are all meddling with. Apart from the normal vacations, this being a corona vacation, further complicates the matter. It is without doubt that all of us are enduring high stress in these circumstances. In the midst of all this, a disabled, a diseased or elderly in our home further aggregates our mental distress. People who take care of children with developmental disabilities and emotional and behavioural issue are certainly going through a hard time. Under normal circumstances their burden would have been shared by special schools and vocational training centres. Being in a confined space of home without a social exposure for long period of time may intensify existing problematic behaviours or showing novel ones in these children. ADHD, LD, Autism, ID are some among the developmental and behavioural disorders commonly seen in children. Most common symptoms seen are: fidgeting, lack of attention, temper tantrums, aggressive behaviour, being easily frustrated etc. Under the present circumstances the lack of managing these behaviours may fall upon the parent.



## 1. Cleanliness of children

Since the outbreak of the novel corona virus, a new norm of constantly sanitising our hands using soap or alcohol-based solvents have been established. Although it sounds easy, its seldom is an easy tasks for children with developmental disabilities or behavioural issue. The tendency of children to touch the surfaces and handle things without any regard for the hygiene escalates the importance of this aspect. So, it is at most important that they should be trained to sanitize their hand thoroughly. This training should follow the procedure for washing hands as per government recommendations. i.e., washing with soap and water for about 30 seconds.

The fact that children with disability, have a weak immune system further makes them more susceptible to infections. Care should be taken to keep their body clean. In the present weather, children tend to sweat a lot, this leads to building up of filth in the scalp, so their hair should be washed regularly with soap or shampoo.

Children should also be taught basic equity of covering their nose and mouth while sneezing and coughing using a clean towel. Parents should keep children away from strangers or people who have come back from abroad. Since corona virus spreads from human to human it is wise



that to teach children 1meter distance if they interact with stranger. This will in turn prevent the spread of virus through saliva particles which are released when a person coughs or sneezes. Most of differently abled children would have difficulty in following instructions and to learn from experiences. As most children are good at imitation appropriate behaviour may be shown and then has to be repeated. Caretakers must always have in mind that the instructions would have to repeated various times and need to reintroduce through various techniques for the child to understand.

## 2. Eating habits and health of children

There is a need to establish a scientific eating habits to ensure that children get appropriate vitamin, minerals and proteins for their growth and sustenance. Fruits, pulses, grains and leafy vegetables should be included in their daily diet. Giving lime juice regularly during the day, may help to tackle the dehydration caused by weather. Make sure your child drink enough water. Avoid as much as processed food as these could



be rich in fat and sugar. Fresh and fully cooked fish or meat could be consumed in limited quantity. Curd, vegetable and salad are recommended for lunch. Food items allergic to the child should be carefully sorted out and avoided. It should also be noted that meals should also be consumed at appropriate time. Being late in having food especially dinner is not advisable as it will lead to health problem.

## 3. Children's exercise routine



At this scenario where we are bound to our house, our daily activities are confined to eating and cleaning. This sudden and profound lack in exercise can have detrimental effect on our health. In children with disability, this lack of exercise can lead to sudden gain in body mass and loss of pre acquired skills. WHO has recommended that children must do one hour of exercise every day. It could be any kind exercise like playing games, yoga, walking up and down the stairs etc. Children's exercises should be adapted to their physical limitations. Parents must consult with their physiotherapist before introducing various exercises techniques. Habit of exercise paves way to a healthy body and an energetic mind.



#### 4. Sleep.

Adequate amount of sleep is essential. We need to control and check with the use of mobile phones at night time. Children should be woken up at the usual time as in working days which could be done with using an alarm clock. If not, after the reopening of schools or vocational teaching centres, it would be difficult and take lots of time to make the intellectually disabled to follow their routine tasks.



#### 5. Medicines

Medical conditions such as thyroid, epilepsy accompanying intellectual disability. Congenital disability, intellectual disability and congenital heart disease are common conditions. For this, consultation could be taken from primary health centres or general medicines can be bought from the nearest medical shops. For disorders such as schizophrenia, mood disorders it is required to take medicines without a break. Breaking of the course of medicines without doctor's prescription will lead to further difficulty.



## 6. Learning new skills

This should be viewed as a chance of acquiring new skills. Each day could be used to learn new skills. For example, brushing, combing, wearing shoes and tying its lace, colouring, gardening, washing off hands



and legs could be taught to children by taking enough time. Contact with the therapist need to be maintained if the child is being trained by a behaviour therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist or special educator. Materials available in the internet could be used to train children.



## 7. Responsibilities/ Duties.

There are many parents who thinks that, since my child is disabled, I should not make him work anymore. But you may know that, it is only the duties you give them, the works they take up, will mould them to get an identity of their own. Small responsible and tasks can be assigned to them . For example,



collecting the newspaper at morning and placing in the appropriate place, arranging newspapers, folding clothes, watering plants and making them to keep their things safe, secure and clean and cleaning the dining tables after having dinner can all be assigned as responsible task. This would help in developing a sense of responsibility. Small roles could be given to children in each one of the tasks performed by elders, this would increase the confidence level of the child which would in turn help in the formation of identity.

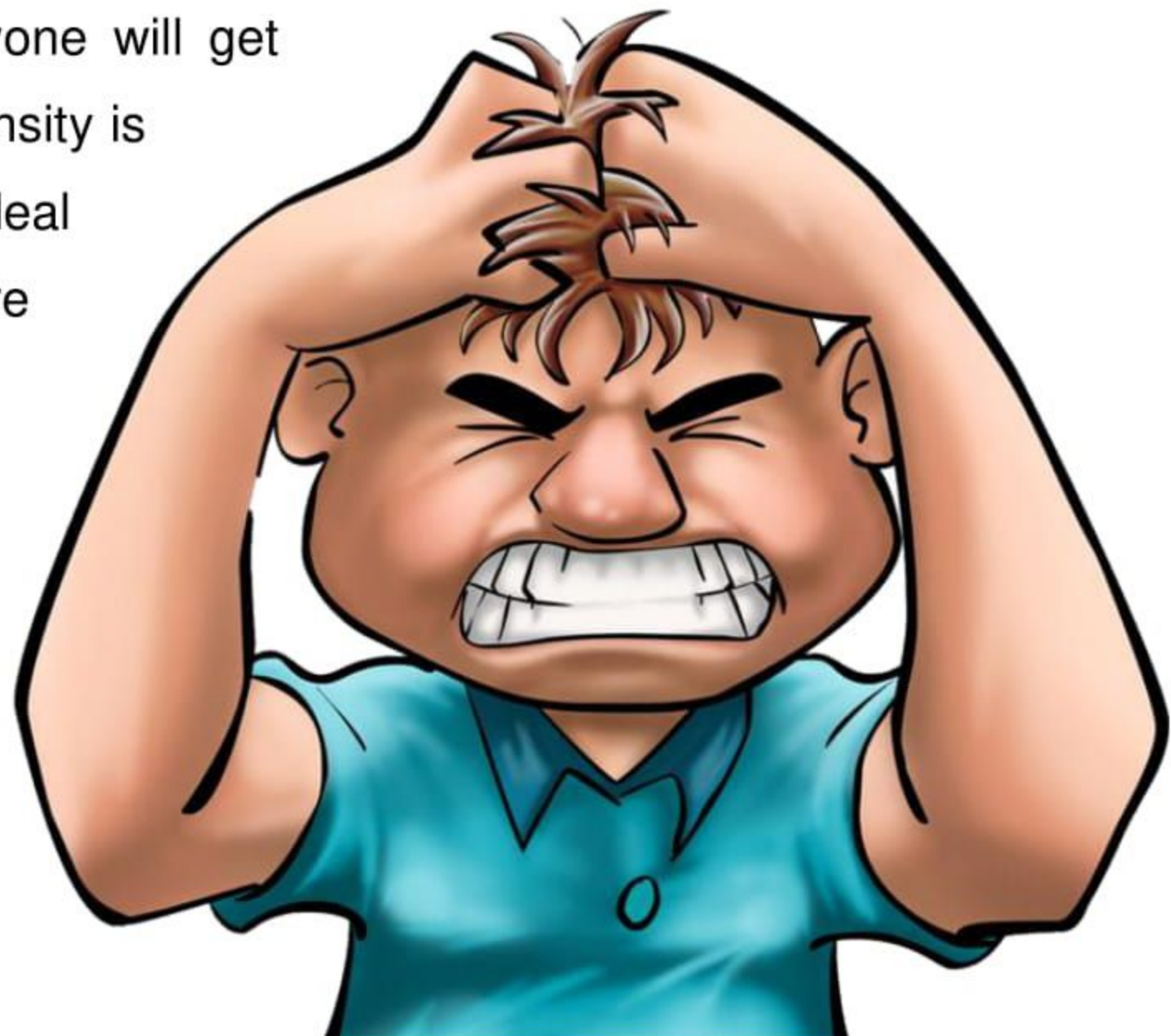
## 8. Entertainment

Vacation is the period for fun. Hearing stories, watching videos are good. Television, mobile games, you tube videos have gained a place in the routine of disabled population too. For this, a schedule can be made by assigning a period of one hour to watch these. Continuous screening would affect negatively, by reducing the cognitive skills acquired till now. When the child is exhibiting some maladaptive behaviour patterns, it should not be encouraged.



## 9. Behavioural Problems

When there comes a situation where there is a need to isolate oneself, everyone will get disturbed and angry. But the intensity is more if they are disabled. So, to deal with it, when such behaviours are exhibited we have to distract ourselves from it and instead concentrate more on the activities. Children can be encouraged when they perform desired activities, and it could be video recorded and shown to them afterwards. Likewise,



he/she will understand what are the desired behaviours are and confidence could be built up using it. Make sure they are not provoked unnecessarily.

## 10. Emotional Problems

Children with intellectual disability lack emotional intelligence. Even though they have difficulty in understanding their own and others abilities, emotions and behaviours



appropriately; they have the ability to imitate, so could be trained and many of the skills can be acquired through it. Children with learning disability/ difficulty have associated emotional problems and thus their talents need to be identified and encouraged at appropriately. Chances of depression and anxiety is high for children who lacks emotional intelligence. To reduce it, chances of getting alone need to be reduced, and chances of mingling with family members need to be increased. If the situation is coming worser, online services and tele-counselling can be availed. Since it is the period of corona, there is high chance of getting fear and anxiety. If the child exhibits different problems than usual, tele counselling can be used.

## 11. Psychological , Physiological and Emotional wellbeing of caregivers.

Studies points out the fact the in every home, children with disability are taken care by their mother/ motherly figure. Within this some are backed up with support in different ways, but some are not taken care of. In some of the nuclear families mother is given sufficient support, but in some it is not, they are in a helpless state. Familial support would help in the development of children. Mother / the primary care taker should take care of the family, but they need not disregard their well-being and happiness and substitute the other. Listen to soothing music, read books that engages yourselves and thus make up your mind stay healthy , positive and energetic. But if the disgusting , negative feelings are overwhelming, consultation of a mental health professional in the nearest centre or online services can





be availed. Pattern of sleep need to checked. Information coming up in social medias are not always true, and thus should not be believed as it is, thus should be experimented on children. We can follow it, only after knowing the source of content. Follow instructions and take precautionary measures given by government officials, and workers in the health department.

When we are quarantined for a period of time, it is usual that we will get physiological and psychological distress. It is always good if we can get connected with nature to appreciate its beauty, it can reduce the feeling of loneliness, urge to get out of home. Take this time to engage with your family, to appreciate the beauty of nature, to tell night time stories with your children sing the forgotten lullabies, all this would give some good memories to ruminate over. We will overcome, please hold on the hope for tomorrow.



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