



With emergency measures in place to slow the spread of the infection caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19), it has become more likely that children will be homebound for the coming weeks or months. While time with family members and activities at home can be very positive, this change can contribute to changes in diet, physical activity, sleep patterns, and stress and anxiety. Below are tips that may help during this difficult time.

1. Establish a consistent and predictable routine.

Kids love routines. Having consistent and predictable routines is calming to children and it can help them focus their attention on what is expected. Routines can help parents feel better as well. If you already have established routines around bedtimes, meals, and exercise, keep them going! Your children already rely on these routines as familiar and predictable events in their day. When it comes to establishing new routines during the school-time hours, consider working together with your child to create a schedule that will suite their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social needs. Keep in mind that the day's schedule may not always go as planned. If children lose interest in an activity or are really enjoying one, it is okay to adapt your schedule according to their interests.

For parents working from home, be clear about limits that will be set around your working hours. Establish a plan for what children will be doing while you are working. For example, having quiet time with a book or soft music, going to a safe play space within the home, or playing with a special box of toys or activities you have put together for them.

2. Nurture learning – but be flexible.

With most children not attending school, parents are now their children's full-time teachers. This can be stressful for both parents and children. Not all children are going to want to settle down for "school time." They are at home, after all. Avoid being harsh or critical, and instead try to be realistic and empathetic both with them as students and with yourself as their teacher.

Again, routines are helpful. Set aside time each day for learning, creativity, and growth. Children are used to a structured schedule at school. Help your kids understand that they will have a schedule similar to what they had at school. You might ask for their help developing the schedule by talking about what a normal day at school looked like. Be sure to have time for breaks and physical activity. Also, remember that learning can take place through everyday chores and pastimes like cooking, cleaning, and shared activities and games.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP SCHOOL-AGED (4-12) CHILDREN THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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As you settle on main themes for learning, build in choices: for example, during art time they can choose drawing or painting; when writing stories, they can choose paper, computer, or tablet. Go over the schedule with children each morning because it might change from day to day depending on potential home and work commitments.

Don't worry about them taking a step back in their schooling; everyone is going through this together. Eventually things will be back to normal and teachers will be aware of what children have been through. Their mental health and wellbeing are far more important than learning and remembering multiplication tables or correct grammar.



3. Talk about COVID-19 - be honest and reassuring.

During this time of uncertainty, talking to children and listening to them is essential for helping them feel safe and secure. Creating an environment where children feel comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns can make a world of difference. You can do this by letting your children know that it is okay to be worried and reassuring them that you will do all that you can to keep them safe. Next, keep their exposure to TV or other media news to a minimum and try to be age appropriate in your conversations. Too much information can be overwhelming. Instead, answer the questions children have in simple terms. Third, focus on what you are doing as a family to stay safe and focus on the things that are within your control. Consider reframing physical isolation to be something positive by explaining how staying home as a family helps other community members stay safe and healthy. Finally, keep the conversation going by checking in regularly to ask about new questions or concerns. It is okay if you don't have all of the answers; being available to your children is what is most important.

4. Promote social interaction at home and online.

While children are at home, parents can promote and facilitate safe and healthy social interaction. Plan family activities, games, and opportunities to play, laugh, and have fun together. Share enjoyable interactions and experiences and create rich family memories. By working together, children and parents will have something to look forward to from day-to-day and week-to-week.

Social connection and support can help children build resilience to adversity. In addition to social activities as a family, children can connect with friends and classmates, teachers, cousins, and grandparents even while staying home. Work together with your child and friends and family to plan connections via phone and/or video chat. Children can build relationships, communicate about activities, share feelings, and receive positive reassurance. Other ways children can stay connected with friends and loved ones could include writing letters, emailing, and using appropriate social media.

5. Accept that your children may take a few steps back in their behavior.

Children experience and respond to stressful events like the COVID-19 pandemic in many different ways. Some children may become clingy and irritable, slip back in behavior, demand extra attention, throw temper tantrums, or have difficulty with sleeping, eating or even toileting. New and challenging behaviors are natural responses, and adults can help their children move through them by remaining calm, being positive, and showing empathy and patience.

While many changes you may see in your children will be momentary, it is important to pay attention. You can always contact a mental health professional if something about your child is concerning you, or you notice signs of anxiety and depression in children including changes in appetite, sleep, aggression, irritability, or fear of being alone or withdrawn.

6. Take care of yourself so you can better take care of them.

During each day you may find that there is little time to focus on yourself. Consider scheduling quiet time into each day, so you can have a few moments to exercise, get in touch with those you love, or just relax. Self-care is not selfish – it is how you can keep yourself grounded so that you are physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of being there for your young child. Pay attention to how you are feeling, and don't hesitate to pause and reflect before responding to your child's needs. It helps children feel safe and secure when they can see that you are calm.



References and Additional Resources

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