

## Adjusting to the new normal: Finding the positives in staying at home with your kids

Author: Maria D. McColgan, MD, MEd, FAAP, Rachel Silliman-Cohen, MD, FAAP

Being a parent is the hardest job in the world, even in the best of circumstances. With the COVID Stay-at-home mandate, there are now the added pressures of home schooling, lack of childcare, and financial stressors. Many of us are feeling socially isolated as we practice social distancing. We want to remind you, although we are physically separated, you are not alone. This pandemic will pass.

In the meantime, we can reframe the way we think about our time at home with our children. Consider taking this time to focus on what matters most – connecting with our children and other family members. What children want most is their parents’ attention – and they will get it any way they can. Here are a couple of ideas to keep your children busy, including resources you can use to find ways to enjoy the together time.

**1. Children do best when they have routine and a sense of security.** A routine creates a sense of security for children because they know what to expect. Create a sense of normalcy in your home by setting a routine for your day. You can either post the schedule on your wall or refrigerator or talk through the schedule with your family. The schedule does not have to be rigid, but will help both children and parents get through the day. The day may look something like this:

8 AM	Wake up routine and breakfast
8:30 AM – 12: 00 PM	School work/educational activities/clean up time
12:00 PM	Lunch
Afternoon	Outdoor time with social distancing
3:00 PM	Reading together
4:00 PM	Free time (may include a small amount of time for electronics)
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Bath time
7:00 PM	Play a game or family TV/Movie time
8:30 PM	Bedtime

[Click here](#) for additional tips for families.

**2. Plan virtual “Play Dates.”** Children need to stay socially connected too. While we still want to monitor and limit screen time, our typically recommended screen time rules can be modified to allow children the opportunity to safely interact with friends and classmates by text, video chats, and even social media. However, children still should not have unlimited, unsupervised access to the internet. Children remain at risk for victimization online. It is still important to have younger children use electronics while in the presence of caregivers and use parental controls and monitoring content for all ages.

[Click here](#) for helpful guidance on screen time for kids.

Creating a screen time family contract for older children is also important. Examples include:

[Family Media Agreement \(Common Sense Media\)](#)

[Family Media Plan \(HealthyChildren.org\)](#)

**3. Be creative.** Pull out your paints, chalk crayons and old material and let the kids go to town. Build a cozy fort with some sheets, blankets and pillows. Here is one to get you started: [Beginners Guide to Building Your Kids an Awesome Indoor Fort](#) . Have a dance party. You can join a virtual dance party or sing-a-long. Play make pretend. Just plain have fun!

**4. Read books together.** Haven't had time to read a book in a while? Now is your chance. Find a book that both you and your child will enjoy and curl up in your favorite spot at home. Maybe even crawl into that fort you just made and make it an adventure! Reading books with and in front of children promotes literacy. Don't have any new books? Re-read a favorite or borrow one digitally from your local library.

[Click here](#) to access *OverDrive*

[Click here](#) to access *Libby by OverDrive*.

**5. Go on a virtual tour.** Many museums, zoo and aquariums have virtual tours and live webcams giving you the opportunity to "go" to exhibits around the world. [Click here](#) for a list of virtual tours from Good Housekeeping and [click here](#) for a list from Family Days Tried and Tested. A few specific examples are below:

[White House](#)

[Natural History Museum of Natural History](#)

[Museum of the American Revolution](#)

[National Zoo](#)

[Clearwater Museum & Aquarium: See Winter](#)

[Aquarium of the Pacific](#)

[We Are Teachers](#)

[Discovery Education](#)

**5. Get outside.** Social distancing does not mean you can't go outdoors! Go for a nature walk to look for signs of spring, ride a bike, chalk on the sidewalk or blow bubbles. Just remember not to gather in groups and maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from others.

**6. Cook and eat together.** There are many benefits to cooking and eating together as a family. Children who take part in preparing the meal feel a sense of pride, and are more likely to try a variety of foods. While sitting at family meals, children and adults have the opportunity to talk about their feelings and experiences. And, dinner time provide structure to the day, marking the transition into the evening and bedtime routine. Here are some helpful examples:

[5 Reasons to Cook with Your Kids \(HealthyChildren.org\)](#)

[50 Conversation Starters for Family Dinner Time](#)

**7. Family Game Night.** Need a laugh. Trying playing some silly games with your family. Create a Quarantine Game Night Board and keep track of who wins the most games.

[The Power of Play – How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive](#)

[Finding Ways to Keep Kids Occupied During These Challenging Times \(AAP\)](#)

**8. Talk to your kids about what is going on.** Children and adolescents are experiencing the stress of the coronavirus pandemic in different ways. Children are hearing scary words, such as "pandemic," "deaths," or "quarantine." They are experiencing loss of daily routines, after-school activities, sports, and special events such as the prom or graduation. Give children the opportunity to express their fears, sadness, or loss. Give them time to ask questions and express their understanding of the situation. Reassure them that by staying home and washing hands they are taking steps to stay healthy.

**How to Talk to Kids about COVID-19:**

[Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus \(Child Mind Institute\)](#)

[Talking to Children about the Coronavirus \(Harvard Health Blog\)](#)

[How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus \(PBS\)](#)

**Adolescents & COVID-19:**

[Quaranteneers: Strategies for Parenting in Close Quarters \(NY Times\)](#)

[5 Ways to Help Teens Manage Anxiety About the Coronavirus \(NY Times\)](#)

**9. Remember, you need a break too.** Take time to keep yourself healthy and well rested as much as possible. Consider taking a virtual exercise class, take a walk outside, or meditate. Try [Headspace](#), [Calm](#) or [InsightTimer](#).

Kids can enjoy the benefits of meditation with you. [Click here](#) for a list of meditation apps for kids.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/lists/meditation-apps-for-kids>

<https://www.gonoodle.com/>

Need a break and the kids need something to do? Play make pretend. Tell them you need a visit to the spa or need a tea party and let them take care of you. You get your break, they have some fun and you just might have fun too!

**10. Recognize that it is normal to get frustrated.** Just remember not to take out your frustration on your children. Hitting, yelling and other forms of violence are never the answer. In fact they are the least effective form of discipline and actually lead to further negative behaviors. Instead use “time-outs” as a chance for both you and your child to calm down.

*April is Child Abuse Prevention Month* – a great time to remember you are working on being the best parent you can be. To learn more about positive parenting:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>

For more information on Coronavirus visit and protecting you and your family, visit:

[Caring for Children: Tips to Keep Children Healthy While School's Out \(CDC\)](#)

[COVID-19 \(HealthyChildren.org\)](#)

***María D. McColgan, M.D., MEd, FAAP***

Child Abuse Pediatrician

The CARES Institute, Rowan University SOM & Cooper University Health Care

Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Rowan University SOM & Cooper Medical School Rowan University

The School District of Philadelphia Board of Education Member

***Rachel Silliman-Cohen, M.D., FAAP***

Child Abuse Pediatrician

The CARES Institute, Rowan University SOM & Cooper University Health Care

Assisitant Professor of Pediatrics, Rowan University SOM