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Advice for Home Learning

Schools have officially closed on Friday 20th March 2020, many families now find themselves supporting children's learning at home. We will provide home learning packs and online resources but it is important that children have a balance of activities.

1. Create Routines

Many children thrive on routine. Consider keeping their regular bedtime and morning routines, sitting down for lunch at the same time as they do at school, and writing out a daily schedule so that they know the plan for the day. Keeping these small things consistent can help our kids to feel regulated, calm and make a potentially scary situation feel much more predictable.

Suggested Routine: Use the school timetable as a framework to support your child.
Things to think about:

When are they used to having breakfast? Snack?

Lunch? Approximately 12.30-1.30pm

When is play time? 10.30am

Break the day into small chunks much like school does with subjects.

If your child is going to complete assigned schoolwork, do they work best in the morning or afternoon?

2. Schedule Playtime

While home is often seen as a place to relax and have fun, scheduling play/downtime may help kids to feel like there is more of a routine. An average day at school fluctuates between time spent on learning, time to process and reflect, and time to have some fun. With an extended stay at home, it may help to touch on all of these activities. Scheduled playtime allows for a child to predict when they will have a break to move their bodies and decompress.

In your new schedule, ensure that there are a few 15 to 30 minute blocks (more or less depending on your child's age for play development) of dedicated child led play. The more a child plays, the more they learn to play.

A few tips for effective playtime:

Weed out the unused and broken toys:

If it's hard to find the good toys, it's hard to find the good play.

Move the "open-ended toys" to the front: Toys with lights and batteries that sing and talk won't hook your child into play as well as simple toys (think toys from your childhood – blocks, cars, dolls, kitchens...).

Limit adult involvement: play is the child's job, not the adults. Accept some play invitations, but don't feel guilty about skipping others. Children need to play independent of adults (independent doesn't mean unsupervised).

3. Build in time for reading

Evidence suggests that children who read for enjoyment every day not only perform better in reading tests than those who don't, but also develop a broader vocabulary, increased general knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures. In fact, reading for pleasure is more likely to determine whether a child does well at school than their social or economic background.

Put in reading blocks. Fifteen to 20 minutes a day is a great place to start (remember, that's total minutes, not all at once. Break it apart). Consider structuring this reading block in a few different ways: parent reads aloud, child reads aloud (if the child can read), and family silent reading time. And if your child wants to extend a reading period, don't worry too much about messing up the schedule. There's no such thing as too much reading, and you can always save a planned activity for the next day.

4. Move Your Body

While getting outside for some fresh air is the ideal way for our children to move their bodies, this may not be an option. Thankfully, there are some creative ways to make sure our kids get in time for gross motor movement. Consider looking at online options for ideas.

<https://tagtiv8.com/move-learn-home/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/supermovers>

<https://www.GoNoodle.com>

<https://www.Cosmickids.com>

<https://www.Gaia.com>

There are many opportunities to move and learn at home. If you are looking for options other than video-based activities, consider building a pillow fort, keeping balloons off of the ground, having a dance party or setting up a home-made obstacle course.

5. Use Screens Wisely

Many parents will no doubt be working from home and have significant to-do lists of their own. While watching movies and favourite TV shows is likely an inevitable – and in many ways beneficial – tool to pass the time, consider exploring some more educational screen-based options as part of your child's day.

To keep your kids from “over-indulging” on screens:

Make screen time predictable: have a set time in the schedule so children know when to expect screen time (like while you make breakfast or before nap time) and for how long.

Turn it off: Follow through when the scheduled time for screens is over, and don't leave TV on as background noise. If the house feels too quiet, turn on some music instead.

Outside of the scheduled time block, only use screens when you (the parent) chooses it because you need it.

6. Bolster Life Skills Education

The process of teaching our kids to become functional adults starts at birth. Consider spending this time teaching some skills in the home: have kids help with the process of doing a whole load of laundry from start to finish, work through a recipe for dinner together or clean surfaces around the house while explaining how to safely use different cleaning products. All of these experiences help a child to understand their future role as independent adults.

7. Work on the Broader Executive Functioning (EF) Skills

EF includes skills such as problem solving, time management, goal setting and organization. Provide sorting activities, have a child create their own schedule, set a

daily goal, practice telling time or play some problem-solving games such as Heads-up, Charades or Guess Who.

8. Manage your child's emotional wellbeing at this challenging time Your children are young and will hopefully remember very little about the actual Covid-19 illness, what they will remember is how the time felt for them.

It is easy for children to get worried about issues that are in the news, especially where they can see that parents/carers and teachers are worried.

Whether your school is closed or open, they may find the coronavirus video series from CBBC Newsround reassuring: they explain what is happening in a child-friendly way. The videos also include an instruction video on how to wash your hands for children, which can supplement the NHS how to wash your hands page.

It is important to give children a chance to talk about their concerns and not make them bottle up fears, especially if they see changes and worry around them, so don't pretend nothing is happening – they will have noticed.

9. Manage your own emotional wellbeing at this challenging time

There is no doubt there is a lot of uncertainty around the current Coronavirus outbreak, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing and the information about the virus remains incomplete.

Understandably, this is causing a lot of worry and anxiety for people particularly around how to stay well and healthy. Given the recent recommendations by the health authorities around 'social distancing', staying in-doors and working from home (as a way to reduce our risk of exposure to the virus), it's likely that loneliness and isolation may develop for some.

It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we are faced with uncertain situations, but the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be to cope with the situation we're having to face. It is therefore important to not only consider our physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to our mental health.

Try to manage overwhelming feelings of anxiety by recognising and acknowledging your emotions regularly, rather than avoiding them.

Maintain a healthy routine and look after your physical health - Get enough sleep, eat regular nutritious meals, try to do some physical activity. This is especially important if you are currently working remotely or off work or school.

Connect with others - Talk to someone you trust and spend time connecting with friends or family who make you happy, but avoid talking only about the coronavirus and the current situation.

Try to manage feelings of uncertainty - Try to separate what is in your control and what is out of your control. Attend to and action the things that you do have control over.

Try some breathing and mindfulness exercises to help you relax

Get outside or go for a planned walk (of course only if in line with government advice)

Keep active/moving - You can choose a less crowded area or a time when you know there are less people about to minimise your contact with others. Try to move your body each day, even if you are indoors, as exercise helps to elevate your mood and lower stress. If you are physically fit and healthy, your body will be stronger and better able to fight a virus.

10. Look on the school website for regular updates and information

<https://www.stmarys.islington.sch.uk/>

Looking for more ideas:

<http://homelearninguk.com> and #HomeLearningUK <http://www.lgfl.net>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teaching-from-home-advice-for-parents/zv6bbdm>