

Ideas to Help Parents and Children through the Pandemic

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Dear Parents,

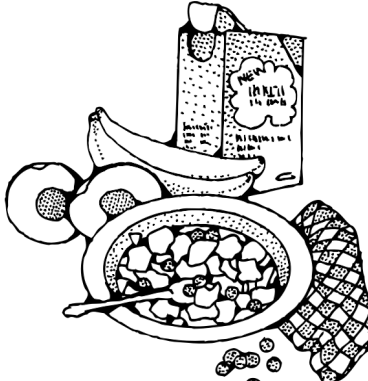
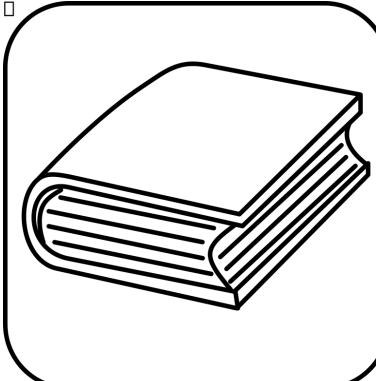
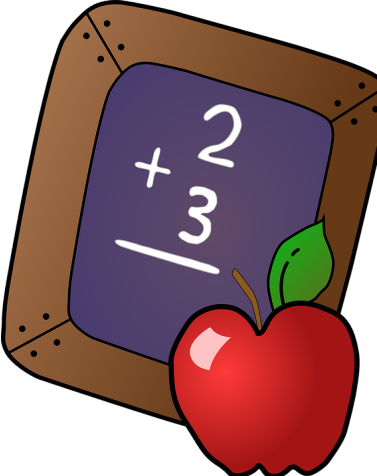
As we deal with these unprecedented times, there is additional stress at home while trying to adjust to a new, although short-term, normal. Please know that we as mental health and school professionals are here to help with questions or concerns you may have. We've put together this brief guide to help with ideas to lessen the stress, if only a little.



Structure, Routines, and Time Schedules:

Kids and adults alike thrive on having a daily routine. Here are a few ideas to help adopt a new routine while at home.

- Structure a new daily routine.
 - Enlist kids to help decide what the routine should look like. Give them choices between a few things.
 - For example, should we do math or reading homework first? Should we start school at 9:00 am or 9:30 am? Allowing kids to be part of the planning process will make them feel important and help ensure they are willing to stick to the routine.
- Once the routine is decided on, make a simple chart to use as a visual aid to help remind everyone of what the daily schedule is (see below for an example). Let children take turns putting check marks in the boxes each time a task is accomplished.
 - For example, if reading homework is scheduled at 10:30 am, then allow Johnny to check the reading box whenever he completes this homework.
- Be flexible with the schedule. If lunch is scheduled every day at 12:00, but kids are hungry at 11:30, take that time to break for lunch. Children and adults alike do not perform well with hungry tummies!

Breakfast 9-9:30am	Reading 9:30-10am	Math 10-10:30am
		

Find Time for Fun:

Being quarantined in the house is stressful for everyone, especially busy, energetic children. Sometimes it's difficult to find enough things to keep everyone busy and entertained. Be creative and allow kids to give ideas of what they would like to do. Here are a few examples of simple activities to keep kids busy:

- Create a treasure hunt for kids. This can be done inside or outside. Make a list of objects everyone is looking for...blue pencils, q-tips, green erasers, paper clips. Give each child a list of their own and a pencil or crayon to check off when they have found each object. Have older children help younger children in the hunt.
- Play some fun music and dance around the room. Nothing creates more smiles than some good music and movement to get the adrenaline flowing. Parents, join in on the fun. Kids love to see their parents dance and be silly right along with them. Dancing is great exercise and makes people smile. Be silly and have fun with it.
- Take your lunch or dinner outdoors. Drop a blanket on the ground and have an old-fashioned picnic. Have a conversation about anything. Talk about the trees or watch the mighty ants crawl away with a crumb of food. Talk about how

determined those tiny ants are! Talk about cloud shapes or different shades of the blue sky. Kids love to have attention from their parents and parents help create wonderful memories for the entire family.

- Read a fun chapter book together. Schedule it into your daily routine. Find a book that your kids are interested in. If you don't have a physical book, borrow it online from the library. Read one chapter each day and discuss daily what happened in the previous day's chapter to keep the story flowing.
- Cook together. Kids can be very helpful in the kitchen and can learn about nutrition at the same time. Allow them to gather plates, cups, silverware. Ask them to get out the ketchup or butter. Let them put together their own plate, with a little direction for portion sizes. Kids love to be involved.
- Give kids simple chores to do on a daily basis.
 - For example, make their beds, pick up their dirty clothes, feed the pets, pick up their toys. Praise them for helping and being a part of the effort to help keep the house tidy.
- Look online for simple science experiments that use common household items. Kids love hands-on activities. Online resources are wonderful for finding science experiments or to use as a math teaching aid. Keeping kids busy with hands-on learning may keep kids from telling you how bored they are!



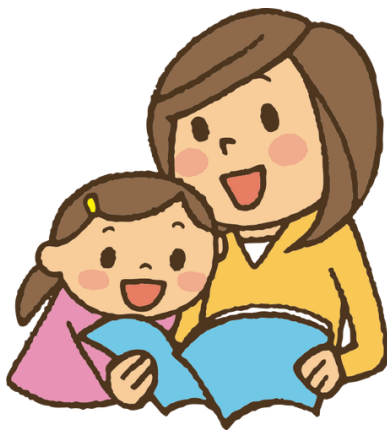
Discipline:

Discipline is inevitably a part of parenting. Discipline should be well thought out before a problem starts and should be discussed with kids so that they are aware of the expectations and the consequences for not following the rules.

- For example, maybe the consequence for hitting little sister is five minutes in time-out. Make sure Johnny is aware of the rule and what will happen if he breaks the rule. Giving a warning is appropriate for things that won't harm others.

Yelling and screaming are not helpful tools for discipline. Children take their cue from parents. Children model their parents' actions, words, and attitudes. The atmosphere in which children live is what they adapt their behavior to.

- For example, if Johnny hits his sister, first take a deep breath before speaking. Then, remove Johnny from the situation and calmly explain what he did wrong and put him in time out for five minutes, if that is the assigned consequence for that behavior.
- Yelling at kids just adds additional chaos and anger to a situation. Taking deep breaths and counting before you react allows you to calm down enough to speak in a reasonable tone. Make your home's environment happy, calm and relaxed. This will help train kids to be happy, calm and relaxed.



Self Care:

Self care is one of the most important things you can do to create a happy environment in your home. If you do not take care of your physical and emotional health, you cannot properly care for your family.

- Take at least 15 minutes each day to take a time out for yourself. Do what makes you happy and feel relaxed.
 - Examples of this are soaking in a bubble bath, taking a long shower, reading a book you've been wanting to read, listening to your favorite music. Do whatever you enjoy and that helps you feel relaxed. That mental break will go a long way in helping you feel like you can conquer the day ahead. It's ok to let the

television babysit the kids for a few minutes so that you can regroup and take care of yourself.

Screen Time:

In this day and age, screens are very much a part of our lives. We hear a lot about limiting screen time and of course, that's good advice. However, screens can be incorporated in the daily routine as either a teaching tool, reward for good behavior, or for family funtime.

- Download a game that parents and kids can play together. Quiz games are wonderful for this.
- Use apps that will read stories to kids or show educational videos. One of the best free learning apps is Khan Academy for Kids, but there are hundreds more. Ask friends for app recommendations!

- Many places such as zoos and museums are offering all kinds of free videos that kids can interact with. Take advantage of these free services while they last.



Relationship Building:

As parents, the most important gift we can give our children is the gift of having a positive, strong relationship with us. Parents are the most important people in a child's life. We teach them many things every day just because they watch and listen to everything we do and say.

- Building that relationship takes respectful communication. Talk with your children. Allow them to say what they are thinking or feeling. Allow them to vent or express frustration or fear.
 - It's important that children learn to communicate their feelings and thoughts in order to establish strong relationships in life. When they tell you how they feel, discuss it. Ask questions. Let them know that you hear them and what they say is important.
 - Young children who develop a strong relationship with their parents, are more likely to become teenagers who have a strong relationship with

their parents. That relationship will be a vital part in helping them make smart choices throughout their lives.

- As parents, allow yourself the grace to be imperfect and to have imperfect children. Everyone learns by making mistakes and it's ok to even laugh at yourself for getting it wrong. Allow your kids to feel that they're ok if they don't get everything right. Talk about your mistakes. Apologize when you're wrong.
- Show children affection as often as possible. Kids love hugs and kisses, sitting on laps and cuddling. You can never give your kids too many hugs. Say "I love you" often. Who doesn't want to hear that? Childhood is such a special time and it goes by so fast. Remember to embrace every moment you have with your kids.



Thank you for reading!

Even though this is a scary time and we're dealing with a situation we haven't seen in our lifetime, learn to embrace this time. There are many negatives to this situation, but let's find the positives. We, as parents, may never have this same opportunity with our children.

The opportunity to spend time with them, help them learn, be their parents, teachers, lunch monitors, recess monitors, story tellers, dancing partners, and fellow explorers of the outdoors. It's always important to look for the gift in the midst of the storm.

While we weather this storm we find ourselves in, let's be grateful for the gift of time with our loved ones.