

Tips for managing children during COVID-19:

Following are some tips that may help you manage your child/children during COVID-19 closures and social distancing/isolation.

1. Create household rules. You and your child can make these rules together. You could use the same or similar rules that your child's classroom or school uses. You and your child can draw or write out these rules and post them somewhere in your home.

2. Set a daily schedule or routine for your child. Try to break up long, unstructured periods into more structured activities. For example, free time could be broken up into time for: books and puzzles, arts and crafts, table top activities, etc. Try to include some outdoors and exercise times in your child's schedule, weather and safety permitting. Remember to add mealtimes into the schedule. Often, children are more likely to look for food throughout the day when they are not in school. Keep portion sizes reasonable and try not to let them snack outside of scheduled meal and snack times. We want your food supplies to last!

Write out this schedule with your child, or make a picture schedule (on your computer or draw it out). Review the schedule with them often. There are many examples of schedules online you can use to help.

We realize that many parents will have to juggle working from home and managing your child's schedule. Try to develop your child's schedule with your work requirements in mind, reserving a quiet activity or screen time for the times that you will need to be doing other responsibilities.

3. Motivate your child. Making your child do schoolwork at home can be challenging. It helps to have something that may motivate him/her to get their work done. You can do this by simply arranging your child's schedule so that work comes before fun activities (e.g., "First schoolwork, then outside play"). You could also set up an incentive system for your child for getting work done. For example, you could make a star chart or sticker chart for your child, and provide them with a surprise or extra screen time when they receive all of their stickers/stars.

4. Rotate and organize your child's toys. Children often have a lot of toys out and around their home, but they sometimes forget about these toys. It can help to organize and limit the amount of toys your child has available to them at one time. Then you can trade out or rotate their toys every day or 2. For example, you could organize your child's toys into toy bins. You could put all but one or 2 of these bins away or into storage. Then each day you could trade out a new bin for your child. This helps keep their toys new and exciting.

5. Help your child get started on activities. Children can have difficulty coming up with their own ideas for play activities, finding all of the right materials, and getting started. Help your child make a plan for what they would like to do with their time. You can give them some ideas by creating a choice board or menu of options for them, or simply by writing down some choices on a sheet of paper. Once they decide what they want to do, help them gather the materials they will need and get them started on the task. Once they are started, you can check in every so often and praise them for sticking with the task.

6. Put limits on screen time. Limiting screen time can be one of the biggest challenges for a family during breaks. It helps to set clear limits before the day begins, and to review these limits with your child often.

You can do this by scheduling screentime at specific times of day, and only allowing screens during these times. You could also allow your child a specified amount of screen time (e.g., 1 hour), and keep track of their screen time throughout the day. Using timers, such as visual timers (there are many apps for this), can be helpful for setting these limits.

7. Manage sibling conflicts. Try scheduling some alone activities for each child periodically throughout the day. You may need to supervise the group activities. Provide praise and allow your children to work toward a reward together by talking nicely to each other, keeping hands and feet to one's self, and working cooperatively toward a common goal.

The following online webinar has many helpful and realistic tips for managing children during COVID-19: <https://www.autism.org/coronavirus-impact-home-all-day-basic-supports-and-strategies-to-get-us-through-and-keep-us-sane/>

But please, be kind to yourself and keep in mind: Whatever your personal, professional, or parenting roles are, this is a good time for us all to remember to give ourselves a break. No parent should be expected to take on the full role of being a teacher and providing the same level of learning as school settings.

There may be times when you need to give your child extra screen time to get your work done or distract them with some outside play so you can take a few minutes to yourself. We hope you will try to give yourself permission to let your usual high standards go from time to time. Virtual connections with other parents around struggles of this new level of care for our community of kids at home might be helpful too. (Your school district or parent group might have a FB page.)

Self-care is especially important for everyone during these uncertain times. Below are some ideas for mindfulness and stress management courses and apps that might be helpful. Many of the practices are very short – even 2-3 minutes as a time during your day might make a difference!

Mindfulness resources:

- www.stopbreathethink.org
- www.guilford.com/MBCT_audio
- <https://palousemindfulness.com/index.html> (Online Mindfulness Course)
- 10% Happier podcast

Mindfulness apps:

- Stop, Breathe, Think
- Sanity & Self
- Calm
- Headspace

- Simple Habit
- Smiling Mind
- liberate

Mindfulness and caregiving recorded webinar: <https://youtu.be/J2pJno3xFBg>