



COVID 19 | HOMESCHOOLING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES



In these extraordinary times that we are in, parents and carers across the world are finding themselves thrown into the new land of *homeschooling* and many are feeling the pressure, understandably so.

Whilst schools are shifting to remote learning and adults are shifting to working from home, it is an extraordinarily large ask of parents to suddenly become proficient homeschool educators. This is not something that can or will happen overnight and not something you are expected to know how to do.

In these early days and weeks of adjustment, the most important focus is on the wellbeing of you and your family, not on making sure your child's grades don't slip. This is surprisingly unimportant actually in the scheme of things.

So take a moment, take a deep breath and read a few simple pieces of advice from teachers and educators on easing the transition to a home schooling environment.

Prioritise your children's wellbeing

Create a very simple routine or structure for the week

Make the most of any outdoor space

Allow your children to get bored

Endorse regular movement breaks

Don't expect your children to work non-stop

### **Prioritise your child's wellbeing**

“Great learning only happens when children feel happy, safe and secure. Provide your children with reassurance and love.” *Jules White, Headteacher at Tanbridge House school, Horsham*

### **Support child-led learning**

“Encourage your child to research something that is of interest to them and show their learning with a creative project. This could be making something with play-dough, junk modelling, papier-mache or a presentation. Let your children experiment.” *Jordan Bickel, Grand Avenue primary and nursery school, Surbiton*

### **Praise children's efforts and behaviour, not their achievements**

“Positive constructive praise that targets effort, behaviour and specific aspects of a child's work is much more powerful than just saying ‘well done for completing your English’.” *Lillie Rosenblatt*

### **Keep to a routine**

“Children need normality, familiarity and structure. So keep to a routine. It makes home schooling easier and helps children psychologically to feel safe and secure.” *Lillie Rosenblatt, teacher at Brookfield primary school in Camden, London*

### **Make the most of any outdoor space**

“There are so many benefits to outdoor learning: children develop an appreciation of the world around them, enhance their solving skills and increase their sensory skills, not forgetting the benefits for physical and mental health. Maybe you could learn about all the plants and trees near your house, or create your own outdoor circuit and do a daily workout together. Doing something physical keeps our mind healthy too.” *Joanna Conway, Headteacher, Whitegate End primary school and nursery, Oldham*

### **Encourage reading every day**

“Whether it's reading to themselves, a parent, a sibling or even a special animal friend, it's essential children continue to read. Reading anything counts.” *Jordan Bickel,*

*[Jo McAndrews](#) is a qualified psychotherapist offering training and support for parents and those working with children. Her specialist focus is on practical brain science and building resilience.*



So, it is here, the time when schools are closing all around the world in an attempt to slow the spread of the new covid-19 virus. Of course it makes sense but how are we all going to cope with such an unprecedented situation? It is not like the school holidays – all the activities, libraries, museums, groups etc. are going to be closed. Many of the usual ways our children spend time will not be available to us – this is not like anything we have ever known.

Here are some ideas about how to approach this time for the sake of everyone's mental health and wellbeing. I am aware that many of us are very stretched and struggling with day to day poverty, stress, work demands, conflict in our relationships, lack of good support, overwhelm, anxiety. If you are struggling, please reach out for support. You don't have to do this alone.

**1. Don't expect it to be easy**

This is new and weird. We are either anxious ourselves or surrounded by anxiety and confusing information. We are making this up as we go along. Of course we don't know all the answers. Many parents find it very hard to spend extended amounts of time with their children. It can bring up feelings of stress, inadequacy, desperate boredom, loneliness. Many people did not have the love, safety and freedom they needed themselves as children and so the pain of that easily gets triggered. And now we are separated from friends and playmates too.

## 2. Don't worry about their education

Many people are wondering how to keep up with their child's education and are devoting hours to homeschool timetables and structures. This is surprisingly unimportant actually in the scheme of things. You will drive yourself mad if you try to keep up with the curriculum and formal studying at home under these circumstances at this stage. Your home could quickly become a battleground of control and resistance. It is just not worth it and not necessary. At this moment, this is an opportunity to learn a whole lot of other things that are not on the national curriculum.

## 3. Set up some good support for yourself

See point 1. This is probably not going to be easy. We all need good support. You could find a couple of 'buddies' who you can contact every day and offload. Choose people who can listen and understand rather than judge and offer answers that may not be what you need. Or stay in touch with groups you are part of through online gatherings. Talk over the fence with your neighbours. Self support is also important. Continue with practices that usually support you or learn some new ones. Mindfulness, exercise, dancing, singing, making things, cooking, whatever helps you feel relaxed, calm and content. This will make a huge difference to your ability to cope minute by minute with the stress of being confined and isolated. *I can't emphasise enough how important this is.*

## 4. Connection is the most important thing

This is an opportunity to build connections with your children. Find activities you can do together, ask them what they would like to do with you. Spend regular time where your only goal is to give them attention and love and see what happens. This will grow resilience and help things to stay calm. Feeling safe and loved is our deepest need. Take this opportunity to give your children more experience of it. I am not saying this in any fluffy way, seriously, the root of resilience and mental health is in loving childhood relationships. Many of us do not find this easy, we have not had enough of it ourselves. This is a chance to slow down and learn. Instead of telling your child to do maths worksheets, tell them what you love about them. Look at them with loving eyes rather than critical ones. As much as possible. Sometimes you won't be able to do this, that's ok, we are all struggling. Just come back to it as a priority when you can.

### 5. Listen for children's anxiety

This is a scary situation, we may be anxious, our children will be anxious.

Listen to what they say, ask if they have any questions. Be curious about their feelings, encourage them to say what is going on in their minds and hearts. Where do they feel things in their body? What are they thinking or wondering? Simply being interested and not trying to solve it will help your child know that they are not alone. Having someone accept and understand us is the antidote to anxiety. We adults need that too – see point 4.

### 6. Invent structures to make the day work

Please don't feel you need to make elaborate timetables to be like the school day. Don't have lesson times where you force your child to sit still like at school. You don't have to be a school teacher (even if that is your day job!). However, some structure will help your family function with some support. Keep it simple and involve your children in designing it. You don't need to stick to the same getting up and bed times as school days unless everyone is happy with that. Things like sessions in the day for outside time, together time, separate time, house cleaning time, playing time can help give some holding.

### 7. If possible spend huge amounts of time outside

If you have the good fortune to have a garden, it would be good to practically live in it as much as possible. If you have open spaces around you where you can be distant enough from others then get out there. This will help with energy levels, light and air, connection with nature. There is nothing better your children could be doing, no not even reading or doing maths. Except maybe cuddling you but then you can do that outside too.

### 8. Find creative projects and games

Here is a chance to start creative and playful activities together and separately. Creativity is absorbing and brilliant for our mental health. You don't have to be artistic, just willing to explore. Play is deeply therapeutic and also just delightful to do. Except of course that for many adults it is painfully boring and frustrating because we got trained out of it too young. If this is you, give yourself the chance to dip your toe in the water with short sessions of letting your child lead you in a game of their choice.

### 9. Consider how you use screens

Screens can absorb children for hours at a time, they can be numbing, addictive, isolating. And they can be empowering, connecting and inspiring. It depends what you are doing on them. You probably don't need a blanket rule for how much screen time but don't let your children become static, numb and isolated playing games and buried in social media. For older children, there are fantastic ways of staying in touch online with their friends – consider video meetings like facetime and zoom to allow real time face to face conversations, rather than relying on messaging and posting stuff all the time. Make sure there are times when people in the household are giving attention to each other – we all need physical proximity and connection to others for our best functioning.

### 10. Expect restless, anxious, chaotic, withdrawn behaviour and try not to punish it.

Again, this might be a very trying time. Your children may be anxious, restless, bored, frustrated with you and each other. This all comes out in behaviour – in adults as well as children. If you come down hard on distressed behaviour you will make it much worse. Punishing it is unfair. Children are doing the best they can in the circumstances they find themselves in. So are adults of course. The difference is in how much power adults have over children and how we live in a society that encourages punishment and threat of children. If your parenting relies on this then you will find it difficult to shift it but it is worth trying. Go easy on them and on yourself. We have a lot to get through and we all need and deserve kindness.



Whilst schools are closed, we're here to support parents and carers in these extraordinary times with a range of ideas and programmes to help.



We're sharing regular tips, guidance and resource ideas through our social media channels to support wellbeing and help us stay connected.

GET CONNECTED



A free daily inquiry-based activity for 5-18 year olds to encourage curiosity and wellbeing by practising and developing key life skills.

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