

Working from home while trying to help your children keep up with their studies can be challenging, if not impossible. Even though most schools are now providing guidance to families, many parents with young children are struggling to keep their children engaged in these stressful times.

This document provides some tip from experts in children's education and how parents can help them learn during the Coronavirus-related school shutdowns.

### **Distance learning tips for parents, from the experts**

“Above all, as you navigate your new routine, try to cultivate patience, practice empathy for your kids and keep a sense of humor. This can be difficult in times of crisis, but it's also more important than ever. Fortunately, kids give us lots of reasons to laugh. And those unpredictable moments can be just what we need to make our new routines work.” -- **Suzanne Bouffard**, a writer, developmental psychologist, and author of *The Most Important Year: Pre-Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children*.

## **Suzanne Bouffard**

### **A writer, developmental psychologist, and author of *The Most Important Year: Pre-Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children***

With many schools cancelled and people limiting their exposure to others, it's up to us as parents to make new routines so our children feel safe and cared for.

Here are some suggestions of how to make a new routine for your weekdays. (I recommend keeping weekends looser, just like we do in other times.)

#### **Set a school day schedule**

- Keep it as close to your child's normal school schedule as possible.
- If your child is not yet in school, create blocks of time during the day for certain types of activities. Young kids love to “play school,” and this is a great time to get them in a habit of a routine!
- If your kids are in grade school or older, **set up specific times for reading, math and other academic work, as well as breaks.**
  - They'll be more cooperative and work harder if they know when they're expected to work and for how long.

## **Learn from the world around you**

Many schools are sending work or providing guidance about what kind of work to do. But if you're not sure what to do, have your kids:

- **READ READ READ!**
- Use your environment. Go for a “nature walk” (even if you live in the city) and point out what you see.
- Encourage your kids to make games out of reading labels and counting objects in your home. You might be surprised at what they come up with.

## **Build time in the schedule for special subjects like movement, art and music**

- You do not need to be an expert at these things. Art can be drawing with a pencil or building a structure with sticks. Music can be singing together (off-key is fine!) or drumming a rhythm on the table for your child to repeat back to you. Movement can be [making up your own dance](#), like Pinkalicious. Don't worry — your child will come up with his or her own ideas, too.

## **Schedule two or three times a day to get outside**

Be physically active! It's important for staying healthy, it's a great stress reliever, it helps us focus when we get back to work, and it makes it easier to sleep at night.

If you can't get outside, play physical games indoors, like Simon Says, [Freeze Dance](#), or Red Light, Green Light. And who doesn't love to have a dance party in the kitchen? Also consider virtual playdates with friends and family. It's a great way to check in on each other during this time.

## **Set aside some quiet time**

Naps are still important for young kids. Older kids need some predictable downtime, too, especially in a stressful and uncertain time like this.

- You can find lots of great free mindfulness apps and activities online, or read these tips on how to help your family de-stress.
- And to go low-tech, keep a family journal or make a daily list of three things each of you is grateful for. Post them on the fridge or put them in a jar so you can revisit them when you're feeling down or stressed.

## **Set scheduled meal times and snack times**

Giving in to the urge to eat all day long will just make you and your kids lethargic. And having set times gives everyone a break to look forward to.

## **Consider your needs as a parent, especially if you're working from home**

If you're working from home, it can be tricky with the kids around. Set up some expectations with your children about when you'll be able to help and when you won't. Be patient with them and yourself while you're getting into a groove. You probably won't be as productive as usual, and that's okay.

Consider your own needs and build them into your schedule. Shower. Prioritize sleep. Plan time for each parent to have a few moments to themselves. Taking care of yourself will not only help you stay healthy, but it will keep you centered so you can take care of your kids.

## **Keep loose but predictable afternoon and evening schedules**

- If you normally do a bath every two days, stay in that groove.
- If you have a limit on screen time on school days, stick to it, or if you want to expand it, do it in an intentional way so the kids know the rules.
- And seize the day to do new things. This is a good time to create new traditions.

## **Plan a routine you can stick to**

Of course, planning a routine is easier than sticking to it. Here are some suggestions for making it actually work.

- Engage your child in making the schedule. This will help them buy into it.
- Post your daily schedule, so everyone knows what to expect, and so you can point to it instead of answering constant questions about when something is going to happen.
- If you fall out of your schedule, don't worry about it. Just reset and try again. Make adjustments if you need to.

# Denise Pope

(In Stanford.edu)

**A senior lecturer at Stanford Graduate School of Education (GSE) and a founder of the education nonprofit Challenge Success**, shares what home-based lessons could look like, the challenges some families may face and why a little downtime – even playing videogames or watching TV – isn't such a bad idea.

## **How are schools likely to carry out lessons during a closure?**

“I hope that, in addition to whatever worksheets they assign, teachers will tell kids, ‘I want you to pick one project that you’re really excited about and go deep,’ ” says GSE senior lecturer Denise Pope.

- Some districts might have sophisticated online capabilities,
- But many schools aren't set up to do much more than have kids read something from a textbook or online and answer questions online or on a worksheet.

Schools will unlikely assign an amount of work equivalent to the hours in the normal school day and homework load.

## **There's going to be extra time**

- My hope is that we can use this time to get kids excited about learning things they aren't able to do while they're at school, rather than having them fill out worksheet after worksheet.

## **What kinds of assignments would you recommend?**

A primary goal is to get students more engaged in a way that also makes the lessons more rigorous.

- Project-based learning is a good way to do that. It will depend on the age, the kid and their interest, but there are lots of ways to encourage a deep dive into something students are really excited about.
- If you're a physics teacher, for example, instead of having students read a chapter from a textbook and answer a problem set, you can give them something real to explore, like skateboarding or throwing a baseball.
  - They can run some experiments on their own to try to figure out the physics behind it, about balance or friction or how distance equals rate multiplied by time.

## **Allow for creativity**

- Students may want to create their own video tutorials on something they love to do and include some background research.
- They could research the process for making chocolate or other favorite foods.
- They might want to interview an older relative or neighbor to explore their life history or their family tree.
- I hope that, in addition to whatever worksheets they assign, teachers will tell kids, “I want you to pick one project that you’re really excited about and go deep.”
  - Because then it’s part of school and they’re getting credit for it and some guidance from the teacher on how to do it, but it’s also fun and there’s choice involved.

## **The role of parents and families**

In the grand scheme of things – especially at a time like this, which can be stressful and scary for kids – this can be an opportunity.

- Teenagers in particular are so overscheduled, going straight from school to extracurricular activities or work obligations to dinner to homework to bed.
- This is a time where they can get more playtime, downtime and family time, which are critical to children’s well-being.
- Kids need free, unstructured playtime every day and especially if extracurriculars are canceled, they’re going to need exercise.
- They need downtime, which includes sleep but also time to relax and decompress. That might mean playing videogames or watching TV for short stints, or just sitting and doing nothing so they have time to reflect, which is actually very healthy.
- And they need family time. That can be challenging, especially if you’ve got working parents with double shifts. We recommend that one parent try to eat a meal or spend some time with their child between shifts if possible.

But as parents and as educators, the opportunity is that we can use this time to help get kids excited about doing things they might not be able to do when they’re at school. There are all kinds of things they can do that can help turn them on to learning during this time.

# **Liz Faria**

**Blogger for MothershipDown.com, as published by Upworthy.com**  
**(510Families.com)**

## **KIDS THRIVE ON ROUTINE AND PREDICTABILITY**

Children need routine and predictability in order to feel safe. This is especially important during a time of crisis.

So, this is very important: Create order, with *some flexibility*, in your days as soon as possible.

### **WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:**

Set up a schedule that involves regular times for

- bathing, eating, school-work/learning activities, and socializing.
- Maintain a set time for going to sleep, and the same bedtime routine your kids are used to.

There is room for *some flexibility* – you do not need to be running a military operation from your family room. But a general structure and flow to the day that the kids can expect will help you greatly here.

## **FOCUS ON SCHOOL WORK IN REASONABLE INCREMENTS**

Establish a certain time of day (not the whole day!) and a certain place for study at your house. A few hours AT MOST should be sufficient.

If your school hasn't sent home any materials, you will be able to find some great learning materials online. [Sheppard Software](#) and Khan Academy are examples of excellent online resources for kids.

Reading with your child, doing hands-on projects, even baking and playing board games can be educational. Again this depends on your child's age. Hopefully we will all be getting a bit of direction from our local teachers, if this quarantine goes on for any length of time.

## **LIMIT YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY BY MANAGING YOUR OWN**

This is a highly uncertain time on a massive scale. While kids will have varying levels of awareness about the scope of concern over the Coronavirus, they will for sure be picking up on our anxieties.

Talk to your kids about what is going on, without being overly dramatic. Fortunately, we can honestly tell our kids that most children are not becoming very sick from this virus, and that they should be OK.

You can explain to them why we are practicing "social distancing" and use this as a teachable moment in prevention. There is no need to unduly scare our kids, but they should have a general idea of what's going on.

If you and another adult are going to discuss the Coronavirus, be mindful of your child's age and emotional ability to process the conversation they may be privy to. Kids hear EVERYTHING. Except when you want them to listen, at which time they hear nothing.

### **BUILD IN TIME TO LET OFF STEAM**

Let's be honest here, this is going to be stressful. You and your kids are going to be on top of each other, maybe for awhile. Nobody is used to this!

So find ways to let out steam – a loud dance party, a quick run around the block with your kids, a communal yell – whatever! Let. It. Out.

### **CUT YOUR KIDS SOME SLACK**

This isn't the time to be on top of every annoying behavior. Give your kids some grace.

They will need it, and also it's been shown that sometimes the best way to deal with an irritating behavior from a kid is to simply look the other way. Not for the really egregious stuff, but for the small stuff.

### **TRY TO GET OUTSIDE**

If at all possible, find time during the day to get outside; in your yard, for walks, maybe on a trail.

This is not a natural disaster or war – we're just trying to create social distancing here.

So get some fresh air when you can.

### **IF YOU'RE WORKING FROM HOME, RELAX YOUR STANDARDS**

- You may need to allow more screen time than usual.
- You may need to accept that the house won't be as clean as you'd like.
- You might make dinner more basic so you don't have to stress about prep or cleanup.

Let some things go, within reason.

## **ASK YOUR KIDS TO STEP UP TO THE CHALLENGE**

Kids like to feel that they have an important role. Help them understand that this is an unusual time and that we ALL need to pitch in to get through it.

- If your kids don't have a few chores yet, this is a great time to start.
- Make it a daily part of their routine, and let them know that they're helping the family out by pitching in.

Also let your kids know that by sacrificing their social and school time, they are doing a great service to other more vulnerable community members. They are helping to keep people safe.

## **FIND A WAY TO MAKE SOME SPECIAL MEMORIES**

As weird as it sounds, there are actually some good opportunities here to make special memories with your kids.

We are in uncharted territory now. I'm almost certain that we will remember this time – and how we came together, or didn't – decades from now. So do your best to find some way to create special moments.

- Maybe every night the kids get to put special toppings on an ice cream scoop.
- Maybe you all read together in a tent with a flashlight, to create a sense of adventure and camaraderie rather than fear.
- Maybe you watch a movie together as a family each night, knowing you can sleep in a bit later (unless you have toddlers, in which case good luck sleeping later).
- Maybe instead of a regular nightly bath it's a bubble bath with glow sticks around the room.

These are the things childhood memories are made of, and despite the fear many of us feel, we do have an opportunity here.



# **SACRAMENTO BEE**

## **Don't try to replicate school**

Homeschool manager and teacher Camille Vocker of Elk Grove had these tips:

- Learning can happen all over the place. You can be teaching your kids math and fractions while at the grocery store, and they are calculating their bill.
- Separate kids, especially when laptops are out with audio on high.
- While the school day goes on for a large portion of the day, spending four hours a day on academics is a great target.
  - “But don't do it at one time. Break it up and give them time to jump on the trampoline or have a snack.

Stanford's Dean of School of Education Denise Pope said to adopt the “PDF” mantra, which stands for **Playtime, Downtime, and Family time**.

- Playtime for teens means unstructured time for social interactions and playing informal sports, games, and other activities for fun.
- Structured extracurricular activities are great and can lead to positive development,
- but kids also need time for unstructured play, as well as downtime where they can relax and rejuvenate, and time with family.

## **Children thrive with structure**

While these next few weeks will feel like anything but school, students should still adopt one aspect from school: structure.

Children want to know what to expect every day, so build a routine, experts said.

- Children should ideally sleep and wake up at the same time every day.
- Mornings should consist of a routine: breakfast, get dressed and ready for the day, children should make their beds and do a morning chore.
- Have a consistent place where they can sit and do their work.

Vocker said while students are not in a brick-and-mortar school, they should still understand the weekdays are for schooling.

- “What I would recommend is start the day strong,” said Salman Khan, founder of the online education site Khan Academy. “Depending on the age group, we start with a little bit of math while the brain is fresh.”

## **Try fun apps and websites on a computer or tablet**

Students K-12 can register for a myriad of academic websites that will help complement the work they did in school:

The website IXL is one of the [most comprehensive sites for all grade levels](#), and measures student progress. Like many websites, it's offering a 30-day free trial.

Khan Academy is [popular, free online](#) site that provides structured learning schedule to students in all subjects.

Its founder, Khan, gave advice to the more than 42 million students now out from school.

**“Focus on the basics,” he said, “If your child of pretty much any age is able to focus on math and reading, two hours a day, that’s a great start.”**

## **Be creative**

Children can lose focus when working on mundane lessons, Vocker said. Revisit assignments again later if needed, and fill the afternoon with fun activities that are still intellectually beneficial.

- Play cards or games like chess to teach strategy, or board games like Ticket to Ride to teach geography.
- Project based learning. Depending on what age, students can dive into topics they are really excited about.

## **Read, read, read**

“If you just have to focus on one thing, I would do an hour of reading, and that could be as simple as a reading a book,” Khan said.

- Vocker recommends children read for 20 minutes on their own each day, but parents should also read aloud to them.

## **Don’t stress**

- If parents or children are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, take a break.

“Your children don’t have to be perfect,” she said. “Parents should focus on their relationship with their child. You don’t want to push a kid to tears over a spelling test or math paper.”