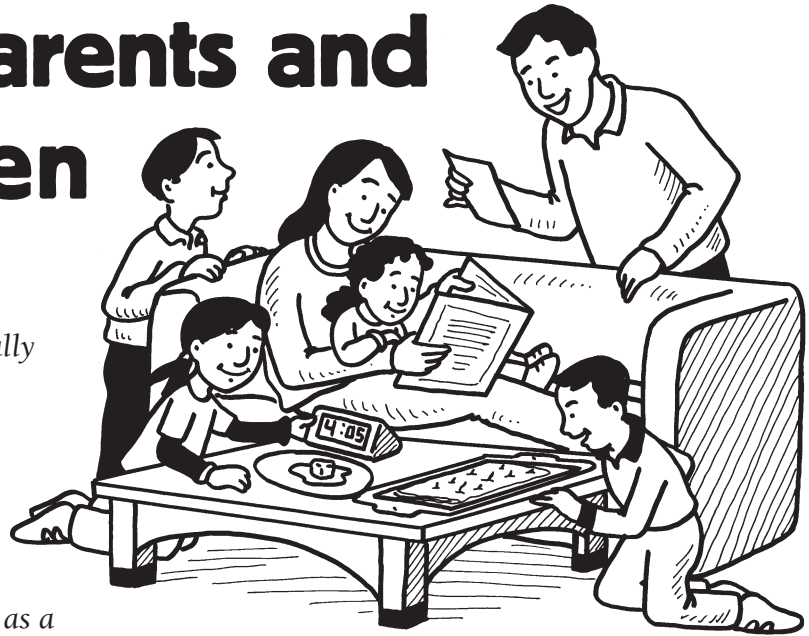


COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION:

Support for Parents and Young Children

Your children's world has changed dramatically in the course of just a few weeks. They're home from school, missing their friends and teachers, and confused about why they can't visit with relatives or go to the playground.

As a parent, you may feel overwhelmed and uncertain about what to do. Use this guide as a starting point for supporting your youngsters during the coronavirus crisis.



Editor's note: Guidelines are changing rapidly. Make sure to follow all local, state, and federal laws and recommendations on social distancing and other practices when using these ideas.

Boost well-being

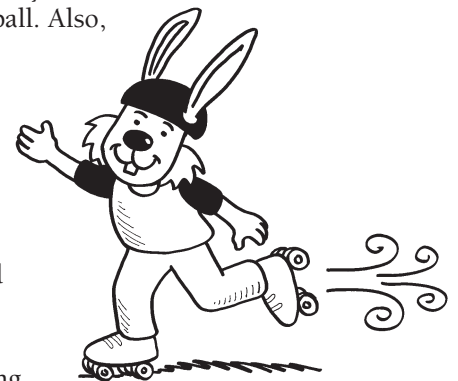
Your child is likely experiencing conflicting emotions. She's probably happy to be home with you—but also bored because she can't go anywhere. Here are ways to maintain some semblance of normalcy.

Find the positives. Look for bright moments each day. For instance, maybe you don't have to commute to your job right now, so you have time before work to snuggle up and read with your youngster. Or perhaps a family birthday party was canceled, but now even people who live far away can celebrate with you...via video chat.

Encourage play. Children need plenty of time to play—especially in difficult times. Together, pull out old toys he may not have played with in a while. It'll be like getting brand-new toys! He can also turn household items into toys. A large cardboard box could be a space station or an art studio (he can color the inside with crayons or markers). A blanket might become a cape or a pond.



Stay physically active. Play catch or kick around a soccer ball. Also, let your child set up a backyard obstacle course. She could arrange outdoor items like pool noodles, jump ropes, hula hoops, and old towels—and then lead the whole family through her course.



Do for others. Thinking of others gets your child outside of thinking about the situation he's in. He might make cards for people who are working hard to help us, such as nurses and paramedics. He could also use chalk to draw pictures and leave thank-you messages on the sidewalk for delivery truck drivers and mail carriers.

Enjoy the great outdoors. Spending time in nature is a proven stress reliever. Plant a garden. Try stargazing at night or bird-watching in the daytime. Have breakfast, lunch, or dinner picnics in the backyard or on the balcony—and invite stuffed animals to join.

continued

Learning activities at home

Teachers don't expect you to homeschool your youngsters—but you can keep the learning going. Encourage your child to participate in any online school activities like virtual circle time or PE class. In addition, use these ideas during your free time or when you do your own work.

Story time. Read to your youngster each day. Enjoy favorites from your bookshelves, and download e-books from the public library. When you're busy, she could listen to authors, teachers, and librarians read at storylineonline.net or on YouTube.

Kitchen math. Ask your child to take "inventory." He can sort pantry items by food group, such as protein (canned tuna, beans) or fruits and vegetables (raisins, tomato sauce). Then, suggest that he make a graph by lining up the packages in even rows and columns. Together, count the foods in each group. Which group has the most? The least?

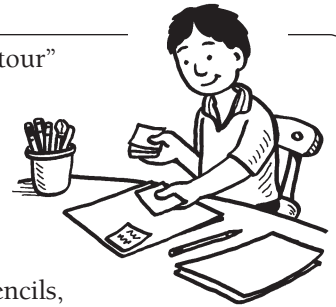
Nature walks. Go outdoors so your child can observe trees, flowers, and animals. Take along a notebook for drawing and labeling items, and carry a bag for collecting rocks, acorns, and other natural items from the ground. At home, she could create a "science museum" to display her pictures

and objects—and give you a "tour" when you're not working.

Writer's den. Help your youngster set up a special spot for drawing and writing, perhaps near your workstation. He could decorate containers to hold utensils (pencils, crayons, markers, pens) and things to write on (paper, sticky notes, paper bags, index cards).

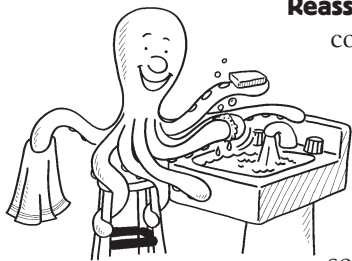
Science lab. Encourage your child to conduct hands-on experiments. She could predict which household items will sink or float in the kitchen sink, then test her predictions. Or have her predict which objects are magnetic and use a refrigerator magnet to see how many she got right.

Idea: Give your youngster a stack of index cards. On each one, have him illustrate a quiet activity to do independently during your working hours. He might draw a book on one card, a can of play dough on another, and a jigsaw puzzle on a third. Then, he can pick one card at a time and do that activity. Be sure to let him show you his work!



Reduce anxiety

It's normal for youngsters—and adults—to feel stressed when their schedules change or life is unpredictable. Consider this advice for helping your little one cope.



Reassure your child. Having some control over a situation can limit anxiety. Talk to him about what your family is doing to stay safe—and to help others be safe. Examples include washing hands often, staying at home, and social distancing (staying at least six feet away from people who don't live with you).

Stick to routines. Have your youngster go to bed and wake up at her usual time. Also, encourage her to dress in regular clothes. If she asks to stay in pajamas, consider setting aside a special PJs day each week. Wearing daytime clothes on other days contributes to a sense of normalcy. And plan regular mealtimes rather than letting everyone snack all day.

Turn off the news. It's important to stay informed, but news can make your child anxious. Try to tune in after he goes to bed. Use kid-friendly language to explain the situation. *Example:* "A lot of people are sick right now. We are staying home to be healthy and help stop the germs from spreading."

"See" friends and relatives

Help your little one stay close to the people who are important to your family. Try these suggestions for keeping in touch via Skype, FaceTime, or other video-chat platforms.

Play with friends. Help your child find ways to "get together" with her classmates. They might have a virtual concert by singing favorite songs or playing homemade instruments. Or they could perform magic tricks, hold a pet talent show, or tell jokes.

Spend time with relatives. Set up video calls with grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Encourage your youngster to ask how they're doing and tell them about your family's day. You might even have virtual game nights. Play Mother May I? (or Grandma May I?), Simon Says, I Spy, and Red Light, Green Light.



Early Years