

TIPS FOR MANAGING AT HOME DURING COVID-19



Begin the day as you usually would

Start your day by making your bed. Shower, get dressed, do your hair. Prepare just as if you are leaving the house for work and school drop offs. The way we start off our day is often the way we carry on into the rest of our day. Even though PJs are cosy, and it's nice to have a few days of pyjama fun, if we stay in them all day, every day, for too long it can slowly decrease our motivation to get stuff done.

Prepare food in advance

It can be helpful to pack a lunch box for the day. Set yourself and your children up with lunch, recess plus a crunch and sip snack. It can be kept fresh in the fridge but if it's packed there will be no need for "I'm hungry, what can I eat?" You will still hear it, but at least you will be prepared! For some children, you may even support them to become more independent with accessing the lunch box at set break times or even get them help pack it themselves!

Take movement breaks

After around 40 minutes or so our minds and bodies need to move. For younger children it's more like 15-20 minutes. You can put on some fun music and move your body through a song or two. You could do this with the kids - it's a nice time to check in with them. A few great resources you can check out for these movement breaks include Cosmic Yoga, Just Dance, Go Noodle and Animal Walks. The whole family can benefit from movement breaks.

Embrace the benefit of time with siblings

Older siblings can be a great source of support and great role models - get them onboard by modelling what you want your child to achieve. Whether it be with school work or a daily living skill, our children are great helpers to one another. Remember that therapy is not just structured activity, most of therapy involves some sort of play. One parent shared that she has seen her child advance in her play skills with more time pretend playing and role modelling with her older sibling during this time. Another mum shared that her son was going to a lego social skills group, but couldn't continue, so instead the therapist ran the program with the child and his siblings online. Therapy activities can fun for everyone, another parent shared that his child was working on fine motor skills so together they all threaded beads and made bracelets.

Keep to a routine

During this time at home parents have shared with us that for many kids, and especially some of our kids with disabilities, they really thrive when they have a routine in place. This is even more important during this time so new routines need to be put into place. When we have routines that make our day predictable this makes us all feel safe. Routines may also help prevent fights or upsets as everyone knows what's coming up next.

Wake up around the same time for each day

it often helps to keep the same wake up times as pre-isolation. Our body gets used this and has it's own internal alarm clock. Give yourself enough time in the morning to prepare for the day ahead. We all need time to eat, dress, connect and prepare.

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Take time each day for social connection

We all need connection, even more during isolation. Parents have shared with us that many benefit from a little time each day put aside just for social connection. They share that they work best by getting work done in the most energetic productive time of their day and then they play and socialise during the lower energy times. Social media, answering texts and emails, chatting on social apps and video calling is best kept for lower energy times.

Get outside for a bit each day

Fresh air and exercise, even gentle exercise is vital for our wellbeing. Some parents have shared that having a specified time each day to go outside for physical exercise helps. Even if it's just for a walk around the block, picnic in the backyard, a scooter ride up the driveway or to the garden to water the plants. Get outside in the sunshine every day.

Find time to play

During this time at home it's important to remember that play IS therapy and how our children learn, especially the younger ones. One parent suggests we let our child lead and follow their interests. He says he makes the therapy fun, whenever he can so it doesn't feel like work. You can make the game a chance to practise a skill or goal that is being worked on, for example turn taking, listening and following instructions. Let the child be the boss of the instructions and how the game is played, let the child choose the activity without parent taking control. Play is children's work and it's how they learn. Even small chunks of time, at home throughout the day, can be beneficial. Make it playful, laugh and have fun.

Unplug and don't compare

Taking care of our mental health is vital during this time. It's important to be careful we don't get sucked into social media and comparing ourselves and our days to others. Parents have shared it helps sometimes to unplug from too much social media and take a break from hearing about what everyone else is doing. Do not compare and despair and remember we are all doing our best!

Use your calendar to stay organised

Having a family calendar can help to keep the home organised. A parent shared that her and her partner use google calendar. They schedule all family, child, work and household commitments in the calendar so they can see what each other is doing. Another parent shared that her family have a printed calendar that shows all of the family and household commitments including whose night it is to cook dinner and wash up! There are lots of great apps and printable calendars online.

Be purposeful in your time together

During this time many have shared during this new way of living, they have found unexpected joy in the moments of connection and are more purposeful in their time together. Children thrive when we are spending snippets of true quality time with us. They can tell when we are distracted or not really paying attention, so be mindful of how we are when we are interacting together.

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Find little windows of appreciation in your day

There are extra challenges during this time, that is undeniable but parents have shared with us it helps, perhaps especially during tough times, to focus on what we are grateful for. Many have shared with us what they are thankful for and share this also with their children.

Use video calling for connection and support from family members

Video calling is a great tool for connecting their kids with extended family members during this time. One shared how they have asked a grandparent to video call their children while they wait for dinner or asked them to read them a book before bedtime. This is also a fun way for your child to stay connected with their cousins and their peer group. Make it a playful time, perhaps they could share some art, or maybe a play doh or lego creation they have made that day.

Have specific work zones

It can be helpful to slightly change the layout of their home during this period, such as setting up a new work zone. Even if you live in a small flat or unit you can still set up areas for work and for play or an exercise area. Beds can become spaces used to set out projects or build lego creations on. Lounge room floors can become home yoga, dance or gym studios.

Schedule time for yourself

Make sure you also schedule in some protected time slots for yourself too. We all need me time to fill our cups, even if it's only 10 minutes here and there. Three 10 minute breaks in a day can make all the difference to your wellbeing & productivity. Ultimately we'd like to aim for longer but start where you can.

Screen time expectations

Screen time with our kids is going to be very different to how it was & much more purposeful now. Screens and devices are tools. We will be doing schooling and therapy through them. From Zoom and Google Classrooms to Telehealth therapy sessions. There are so many learning Apps that engage our child & make learning visual & fun. Kids remember and learn so much more easily this way when it's a game and engaging their imagination through play.

Set roles

During this time at home, our roles may have changed. Some of us might also find ourselves in the role of a home-teacher. Parents have shared it helps to set out roles for everyone in the family during this time, so they know what is expected of them. Young children like to be useful just like the older ones do. Let them know in advance what your expectations are of them throughout the day, along with what they can expect from you during this time. You could do this using a visual chart to show the daily activities and the roles of each person on the chart. i.e.: child is a student between 9:30-11:30am & the parent is the home Teacher in this time, then in meal or play breaks we go back to our roles of child & Mum. This may also include other siblings playing their role of student or classroom helper, assisting their sibling in school activities. You could discuss this schedule and their roles over breakfast.