

## Tips to help parents cope

Children thrive on routine and predictability, both of which are in short supply right now for families across the country and well beyond. Despite the uncertainty in the community, you still can try to foster an environment that includes as much routine and predictability as possible. Below are some tips to manage children's increased time at home.

### **Validate first**

Before offering some tips on how to manage the day-to-day, my first suggestion is to validate both your and your children's experiences. Validation acknowledges how a person is feeling without agreeing or disagreeing. It shows children and adults that they are heard and helps them manage their emotions.

Acknowledge for your children that it may be frustrating, disappointing, and sad that activities have been canceled or postponed. It also may be worrisome and stressful because none of us are sure when the return to more typical routines will happen. Let your children know that it is okay to have these feelings, *and* the family is going to do its best to make the most of these changes. Using "and" rather than "but" accepts both thoughts.

Like your children, you also deserve validation. These changes have likely turned your world upside down without sufficient time to prepare. You can feel exasperated and worried even when you're trying to make the most of these experiences.

### **Keep a consistent schedule**

It may not seem like a certainty right now, but schools will reopen at some point, perhaps sooner in some communities than in others. Sticking with a routine similar to the one practiced for typical school days will help make any return to school smoother, as well as give shape to each day. Try to keep your children's morning and bedtime routines the same as if they were preparing for school. Keeping meal times the same also can help.

Create a daily schedule that is structured for your children. You can foster a sense of collaboration and control for them by creating a list of activities and allowing your children to

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pick when they happen. For example, your children can pick during which hour-long blocks of time they do math work, science work, reading, etc.

Be creative with electives. Perhaps children can do a craft during art time, write a song that lasts 20 seconds to sing for future hand-washing for music, see how many jumping jacks they can do or choreograph a dance for phys ed, and do improv skits for theater.

If more than one adult is at home or working from home, it might be helpful to coordinate your schedules as best you can to tag-team monitoring your children's schedule when needed.

### **Have a plan for screen time use**

Screens may be in use more often now if your children are using online learning programs and virtual classrooms. If you have a screen time plan for your family, you still can keep that in place for the typical after-school hours. Your plan should focus on recreational screen time use, such as the use of video games. Review any screen time plan and limits with your family to avoid potential attempts to negotiate and argue. If you do not have a screen time plan in place yet, the American Psychological Association provides [tips](#) for how to create one.

### **Be creative with socializing**

Technology now allows us to get creative with social interactions to help prevent loneliness, while still adhering to social distancing guidelines. You can schedule virtual playdates for your children and FaceTime calls with family members during after-school hours. Platforms such as [Google Hangouts](#) and [Zoom](#) allow children to have virtual group hangouts, so there are still ways to remain connected to others while staying off loneliness. This differs from online games that allow users to interact with unknown players. It's important to monitor any virtual interactions that your children are having to make sure those on the other end are known and appropriate connections.

You, too, can plan time to connect with fellow parents online or by phone, to learn which activities have kept children engaged and to simply talk with one another. Check with your child's school or your town to see if there's a listserv that promotes this. All of you have a tremendous amount of expertise worth sharing, and you can bond over having more time

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with your children than you ever could have imagined! Remember that you are not alone; we are in this together and doing our part as a community to keep everyone as healthy as possible.

**Source: Harvard Medical School**

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