

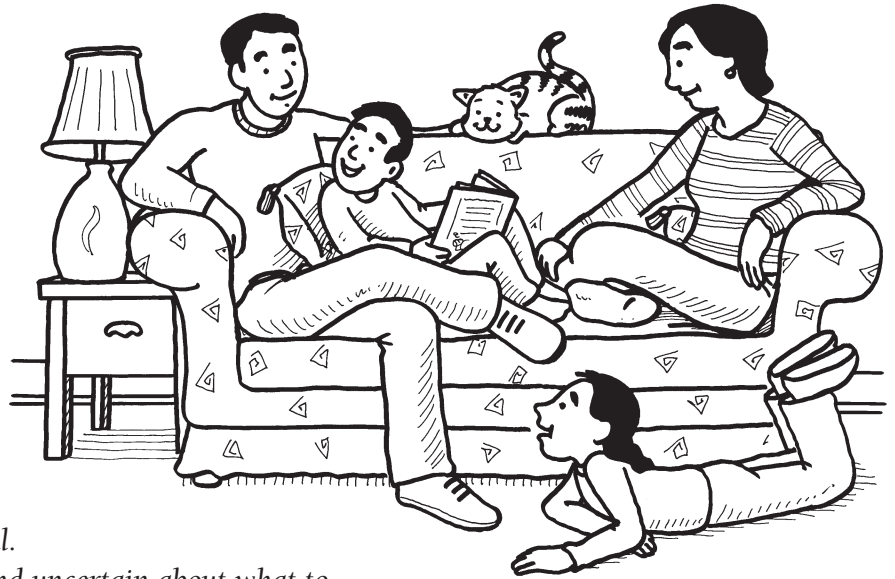
APRIL 2020

COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION:

Support for Parents and Children

Your children's world has changed dramatically over the course of just a few weeks. They're home from school, missing their friends and activities, worried about what's happening in the news—and unsure of when life will return to normal.

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



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 children are likely experiencing conflicting emotions. They're probably happy to be home with you—but bored because they can't go anywhere or have anyone over. Here are ways to keep life as close to normal as possible.

Find the positives. Look for bright moments each day. For instance, maybe you're not commuting 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.

Stay physically active. Go for runs or bike rides, and play backyard games. Have everyone put on comfortable clothes and gather in front of the TV or computer for a free fitness class. Try a site like [youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga](https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga) or [lesmills.com/us/workouts/youth-training/](https://www.lesmills.com/us/workouts/youth-training/). Your child's dance or martial arts classes may even be continuing online.

Encourage play. Children need plenty of time to play—and this is especially true in difficult circumstances. Pull out old toys they may not have played with in a while. It'll be like getting brand-new toys! They can also turn household items into toys. A cardboard box could become a bear cave, a school bus, or an art studio



(they can color the inside with crayons or markers). A blanket might be a cape, a tent, or an island.

Enjoy the great outdoors. Spending time in nature is a proven stress reliever. Take family walks and observe animals, trees, and flowers along the way. Plant a garden. Try stargazing at night or bird-watching in the daytime. Have picnics in the backyard or on your balcony.



Do for others.

Thinking of others gets your children outside of thinking about the situation they're in. They might make cards for people who are working hard to help us, such as nurses, doctors, and paramedics. They could also use chalk to draw pictures and leave uplifting messages on the sidewalk for delivery truck drivers and mail carriers.

Manage family time. Being together 24/7 and unable to leave your home can cause tension among family members. Encourage siblings to play separately when they've had enough of each other's company. Also, it's healthy for parents to have some time to themselves, so relax with a cup of coffee before your child wakes up, or plan at-home date nights with your spouse.

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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 children cope.

Provide reassurance. Having some control over a situation can limit anxiety. Talk to your child 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. Stick to your youngster's regular bedtime and wake-up times. 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 will contribute to a sense of normalcy. And plan regular mealtimes rather than letting everyone snack all day.

Limit access to news. It's important to stay informed, but news coverage can make children feel anxious. Keep the news off, and set certain times each day to check for updates. If you have a young child, you might consider tuning in only after he goes to bed.

Keep reading!

Reading every day is one of the best ways for your child to keep up skills in all subjects. Try these ideas:

- Set aside time each day to read with your youngster. You could enjoy favorites from your bookshelves and also download e-books from the public library. Encourage him to choose a variety—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biographies, how-to books, and more. Let him pick books he can read on his own as well as more challenging ones for you to read aloud to him.



- Together, watch authors, teachers, and librarians read aloud online. (Try storylineonline.net or search YouTube for “read alouds.”) Then, suggest that your child make her own story-time videos—complete with props or puppets.

Learning and working from home

When your children do schoolwork at home, you may wonder what your role is, especially if you're working remotely, too. Keep in mind that teachers don't expect you to homeschool your youngsters—but you can offer support and encouragement, just as you would with regular homework. Here's how.

Get set up. Have your child find “office space” and gather supplies. She'll need to work in an area without background noise and where she won't disturb you if you're working, too. If she's participating in classes online, make sure she logs in on time—a few minutes early is ideal in case there's a glitch. She should close browser windows and tabs and put away devices she's not using for school.



Create office hours. Help your youngster make a schedule that includes class time and independent work time. If you're working from home, let him know what your hours are. Schedule a lunch break and a snack break so you can eat together. *Fun idea:* Ask your child to make and decorate signs with office hours for each of you. He'll be proud of his signs and may pay more attention to the “posted hours.”

Offer assistance. Try to be available in case your youngster gets stuck with her work. If she needs help during your office hours, she could write you a note. Then, provide help when you can take a few minutes away. *Tip:* Show interest by asking what she's learning and looking over her work.

Stay in touch

Combat social isolation while you are social distancing. Use these suggestions for staying in touch with family and friends via Skype, FaceTime, or other video-chat platforms.

Spend time with relatives. Invite grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins to participate in family game nights. It's fun—and it helps to reduce loneliness, especially for people who live alone. Play charades, Pictionary, or name-that-tune.

Hang out with friends. Encourage your child to plan online get-togethers. It will feel great for classmates to see each other in real time! They could perform a concert by singing or playing instruments. Or they might make up dance routines. Another idea is to hold a craft party—they can chat while crafting (making jewelry, knitting) and share their works-in-progress with each other.

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