

Family Schedule

The news come: 2 or 3 weeks off school, may be 6 in some areas...what to do how to organize the household? Self-isolation, what to do with that? Of course it will depend of the age of the children as to how the household is organized and activities set up, but overall there are some principles that can be implemented straight away to support a smooth transition to this way of life. Here are some preparation top tips:

- 1.) Setting Up a Family Meeting – calling a family meeting is important to set ground rules and expectations for the duration of this situation. Ask all to participate and look into what is their understanding of the situation, what this means and why are we doing this...it will give everyone a sense of purpose and meaning. Validate emotions as children may feel like things are not fair. Write together a poster with ground rules, decide of the ground rules together, like how many hours of devices and games for example, chores, cooking and ask everyone's contribution to family household. Why not take this opportunity to reorganize drawers, desks, cupboards and do a clear out! or even redecorate a room, providing you have everything you need.
- 2.) Setting Up a Schedule – Having a calendar or a schedule outlining different activities will help create a routine and establish predictability. It can be done visually using color coded signs, see picture above. Although not necessarily needing to be equally disperse across the day, deciding on a schedule together will help family functioning.
- 3.) Deciding on Different Activities – When discussing different activities, it is important to ensure that all family members' needs are met. For younger children, this may need play and unstructured times, as for older children, it may mean learning online with structured educational activities set by the school. For parents, it may need some time to work and communicate with colleagues. Remember it is also important to allow for self-care and time for you, like putting the oxygen mask on you before someone else! What activities can we do from home? You may think it will be a long haul! Here are some ideas of different educational, cognitive and creative activities that can be done at home.

10 Activities for Home

1. **Setting Up a Den in the house or a Camp in the yard** – This activity can be useful to create a safe place for children and a place they know they can have some quiet time such as reading a book, playing with little people, teddies or puppets. You can ask them to contribute to set it up with you, make decorations, put up lights and a sign. Children will find this fun and different. It can create an imaginative world for the child.
2. **Setting Up a Learning Place in the house and Do Learning Together** – It is important that children feel they have an allocated space in the house where they can concentrate and focus on learning. It does not have to be a big space and can even be a shared space. It is more about how we use this space and what we do when we are learning. Setting up some ground rules for this will also be helpful. With a schedule, allocate time to learning in short and fruitful bursts, it

is more about the quality and the positive experience of learning rather the quantity and speed at which we do these learning tasks. When you are noticing that learning is no longer fruitful, have a short break, a snack, a glass of water, some movement breaks. Family learning can be rich as we can all learn together and share understanding, problem-solving and information.

3. **Cooking Together** – Cooking is great as it also includes literacy and numeracy tasks such as reading recipe or counting and measuring ingredients. Involving children in cooking can be fun and full of joy as they are involved in producing a tangible product at the end. You can also ask the children to finish off the cookies, cake, etc. by decorating them, lots of time can be spent on this.
4. **Puzzle, Lego, Visual-Spatial Activities** – These activities tend to be calming as the brain focuses on putting things together rather than verbal or emotional demanding tasks. Offering these activities in the house will be of benefit to everyone as it will help all involved to be grounded and calm. You can leave a puzzle out of the kitchen table, put a table cloth over it and take it off when you are wanting to complete the puzzle. Lego are also such as great activity to do together.
5. **Setting Up a Fun Project** – It is important to vary activities, like a carousel. We start with one and move on to the next. When activities are designed to promote different areas of development, children will find this more engaging than if it is tapping in the same type of skills so it is important to also have something creative, a fun project you will enjoy doing together. A fun project could be: making a scrapbook of different drawings, paintings, making characters out of modelling clay, picking up leaves from the garden and finding the name of the tree online, taking photographs of wildlife in the garden such as birds, animals, painting rocks with emojis on them, drawing a cartoon strip or writing a collection of short stories, inventing characters and drawing these, so many things that can be done. Some children may like the challenge of a research project in addition to work set by the school.
6. **Starting a Collection, Playing Board Games** – As a child, I remember having an extensive stamp collection. We used to spend hours looking at the stamps. What about a stones, leaves, seashells collection or other collections. Board games are also a go too. Lots of literacy, numeracy and oral expression skills to be developed with these games. Scrabble, Boggle, Scattogories are great for building literacy skills. You can make your own snake and ladder game using templates on the web.
7. **Sending Messages, Letters and Postcards to Family and Friends Abroad** – Keep in touch with your social networks via different communication modes either video call or messaging. Why not take the time to write a letter or a postcards to mail at a later date. Lots of literacy and oral expression skills in these activities!
8. **Learning a New Skill Together and/or Teaching a New Skill** – What an amazing opportunity to take a new hobby as a family or teach you children a skill. There are lots of youtube videos nowadays that can teach skills step by step. Learn to say words in a different language, learn

how to do sewing, knitting, crochet, slime, scrapbooking, photography. If your children are older, you can design a webpage together or you can have a special projects designing cards online.

9. **Implementing Routines for Self-care and Mindfulness** – It's ok for all involved to feel this is not a normal situation. It can create some anxiety and stress to see parents, the world being particularly different. It is important to keep communicating, being transparent, responding to questions, presenting the facts as well as not bombarding with facts. Children are curious and like to find out about the world so it is a good opportunity to open their thinking by sharing information, exploring maps, countries. It is also important we are aware of our feelings and able to recognise sensations, feelings and actions. It can be helpful to open up conversations about explaining bodily sensations that are linked to feelings. Some children don't always know the link between sensations and feelings and will call it like "I feel hurt in my tummy". You can make a set of cards together or create a poster for a central point in the house with explanation of different calming activities. Implement some self-care activities together such as doing a calming activity together, reading a book, relaxing, watching a film. Take the time to point to your children feelings in the here and now, and describe what it feels like. For example, "I like when we are together, reading a book, it makes me feel calm".

10. **Exercising** – Don't forget to move and for the full family to move. You can set up some an obstacle course in the garden for example. This can be done using household items like a skipping rope, bottles, a ball. Like do 10 jumps, 10 skips, 10 hoops in the basketball hoop, knock 3 bottles down, etc. You can set up a challenge and time them going through the parcours. Children can invent it, but will also need support to think about it. Fine motor skills gym trails can also be helpful such as having lots of different activities promoting finger movement like threading, developing pincer grip activities. Walking the dog, playing with an animal can also be part of the routine.

Overall, it feels like there is a lot to do! I sincerely wish you all the good luck with your time off. Enjoy a slower pace of life, perhaps it will eventually feel a much needed time to pause, reflect, regroup and slow down.