

Homebound- Tips to Help Manage School Closures and Social Distancing

Children and families across the country are becoming all too familiar with the term “social distancing”. As medical experts press upon families the importance of staying home, learning to navigate such lifestyle changes may be difficult for kids. According to the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, not only are boredom and frustration common during extended periods at home, “the lifestyle changes may also contribute to social isolation from peers and teachers, anxiety, and tension among family members due to a lack of personal space at home.” Over the past couple of weeks, several resources have surfaced to support families in better managing their time at home. Below are some of our favorite tips and ideas.

1. Keep a Routine- kids are used to following a schedule and thrive on structure. Develop a routine that fits into the “new normal” for days at home. Making a visual schedule that can be posted in a common place within the home can help communicate to kids what to expect. Include times to wake up and start the day, mealtimes, set aside time for learning/school work, provide breaks for exercise and outdoor play, include free time, as well as family activities such as game night or movie night.
2. Help Kids Stay Social- social distancing reduces children/teen’s capacity to socialize with friends. The impact of this may vary depending upon the age and development of your child. For example, teenagers may need more opportunities to connect with peers compared to younger children. FaceTime, Zoom, Skype and certain video apps allow for face to face connections from afar. Encourage kids to pick up the phone and call friends or family members weekly to stay connected. While email and instant messaging are also tools that can keep people connected, it doesn’t replace seeing someone’s face or hearing a familiar voice. Now may also be a good time to introduce kids and teens to the “old fashioned” written letter. Get out the paper, pens and envelopes and mail weekly letters to grandparents, friends or neighbors.
3. Channel Your Child/Teen’s Interests- a key to keeping kids engaged in activities is making sure it is interesting to them. Ask kids to think about a new skill they would like to learn, or a place they would like to visit. Several online platforms like YouTube offer opportunities to learn new skills while there are many online resources to take virtual tours of landmarks and other parts of the world. For older kids and teenagers, time at home may also be an opportunity to teach everyday life skills like how to iron a shirt, do laundry, change a tire, mow the lawn or cook.
4. Tap into Online Educational Resources- Live Science offers a list of games, science experiments, live demonstrations and virtual tours <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-kids-activities.html>. Scholastic has a learn at home website that offers stories, videos, and fun learning challenges <https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>. If you are familiar with the ever popular TED Talk platform, TED-ED is TED’s youth and education initiative designed to spark children/teen’s curiosity through a library of video based lessons organized by age level and subject <https://ed.ted.com/parent>.

References: American Academy of Pediatrics; Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress; www.livescience.com; www.parade.com; www.scholastic.com