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Since the start of the Coronavirus' spread we've all started to take measures to slow the speed of transmission. Taking into consideration failed social distancing measures in other countries we have been told to prepare for lockdown measures to be put in place. Which means schoolchildren may need to be kept home from school.

While our kids may be excited about the possibility of an extended break from school you may be secretly (or not so secretly) concerned about how you might cope with everyone at home. Unlike school holidays, we won't have access to playdates, grandparents or extra- curricular activities. We may also need to continue working from home, as might our partners. It's best to avoid fantasising that this could be the ideal family staycation. You should be prepared for some tough psychological and emotional moments.

Many studies have shown that being in quarantine can have significant impacts on our mental health including acute stress, agitation, fear, insomnia, low mood and anger. Children can often be more susceptible to stress however will often not exhibit these symptoms in the same way as adults do which often means we tend to think they are doing better than they might be.

It doesn't have to be dire though, the fact that we will all be in a similar position will help us to weather the storm. It is also important to see our isolation as a direct contribution to the wellbeing of our community as opposed to an enforced limitation on our freedom. Seeing these measures as necessary steps we are taking to protect ourselves, our loved ones and the community as a whole can instil a feeling of connection and solidarity between us. We know that this mindset can provide a huge buffer in our response to difficulties and assist with our resilience.

There are some strategies that we can use to make the most of this time and help save our sanity.

1. Keep a routine

There may be a temptation to treat every day like a holiday or weekend. While it is a great opportunity to really slow things down, it is important that kids are able to maintain a regular day. Set a time by which everyone is expected to be up and ready for the day. Have breakfast together and if still possible, try and get out for some fresh air and exercise. A gentle walk or run around the park will be a great way for everyone to get a clear head and a good start to the day.

Set up times for breaks and lunch, especially if you are also working from home. Try and hold these in

different areas of your home and try and just have some down time all together.

Set up time throughout the day for free play. This doesn't have to include screen time – I would recommend that screen time be about the same as normal. You can ask your kids to come up with a list of interesting free time activities.

2. Set up a flexible schedule (more of a guide and order of activities)

It will be good to have set ahead of time a schedule of activities that kids can do in the first half of the day. It is likely that this is when everyone will be at their best. Sit down with the kids and develop a scheduled list of tasks and activities that they should work through. If you need to complete some schoolwork, separate work into different activities. For example, maths worksheets, spelling and writing tasks, reading. Be specific with the tasks for each day.

Another essential is to use alarms or timers so that they can change activities every 20 minutes. 20 minutes is about the upper limit of our focused attention. If we want to avoid fatigue, irritability and poor behaviour try and stay within their attention span. You may even need to reduce it to 10 minutes depending on their age and attention spans.

You can get some great ideas for children's activities, and web resources from a number of places at the moment. Many museums around the world have virtual tours, zoos and other places of interest as well. There are also some great art resources out there that kids can follow on Youtube. A search online should help you find quite a few lists of resources.

If you are working, it is imperative that these scheduled activities are things children feel they can do independently but make sure they are not somewhere that makes it hard to supervise. That way you also have some blocks of time that you can get through your work. You could also try to schedule important calls and deadlines for the first half of the day – this is when things most likely, will be running smoothly.

3. Share the load

If you have a partner, then you should try and give each other shifts. This will give you both much needed quiet time by being able to work in another area of the home. Check in with each other and compare when you may need to work towards important deadlines or calls. See if you could change your schedules to complement each other's availability so that you are both able to stay on top of your work and have more time with your kids.

If, like me, you are a solo parent, see if you can schedule your work early in the day and then a little later into the evening so that you have the ability to spend time with your kids during the middle of the day.

Make regular chores and housework part of your kids schedule and have dedicated housework times, work times and free play times together. That way the family is working more in sync.

4. Make use of the whole house.

Depending on the configuration of your home, identify different areas of the home and move from one area to the other. Changing locations can help delay frustration and cabin fever.

5. Get social!

Use video calling as much as you can. See if you can get a few children together at similar times every day to have online play dates. You could even share the activity load by having one parent run an activity with online participation with a small group of their friends.

6. Have fun and create some memories!

This will probably be a time we will all remember. It is an opportunity to connect, slow down and become more flexible. Think of this time as the time your children as adults will remember and see if that can help you ease some of your stress. I promise you, for most kids nothing they miss

learning should make a difference in the overall trajectory of their lives.

Kids will require a lot of comfort and support. Be present and show that you are calm and appreciative of this time with them. Walk slower, talk slower, put on some music exercise and play more creatively.

Don't forget to exercise. Try some family exercise ideas – have family dance-offs, do an online karate class. Try to exercise twice a day, especially in the afternoon – this will burn off any tension that has been mounting during the day as well as help with sleep.

7. Check-in

Check-in with your kids about how they're feeling at the moment. Invite them to ask you questions and let them express themselves during this time.

Check-in with you too. It will likely be a stressful time trying to come to terms with events unfolding around us, stress of managing work and kids and many will also be facing difficult and financial stress. There's not much anyone can do right now other than get through. Don't neglect your own mental health. Find some time to get out on your own, exercise, maintain your self-care practices any way you can – it's the perfect time to start meditating, listening to podcasts or audiobooks and developing a self practice of patience, wisdom and nurturing. Even in the midst of chaos.