



## Supporting Families to Help Children Learn and Develop at Home

TIPS AND RESOURCES DURING COVID-19



## Our New Reality

The COVID-19 has affected all aspects of our lives. By now we all know that self-isolation and physical distancing are key strategies in 'flattening the curve' of new coronavirus infections. As a result, we now have little to no physical contact with others outside of our homes. We understand that for parents and caregivers, it is difficult to transition into a world where usual employment and modes of work are no longer available, where they need to look after the health and wellbeing of the family, and where they have an increased role in helping their children continue to learn outside of school.

We know that meeting the demands and expectations of supporting children to 'learn at home' can be overwhelming. Whether it is receiving new instructions from teachers, navigating hundreds of online resources or engaging children in activities, it has become stressful and tiring for many of parents to design, adopt or adapt materials to what really works for their children within their homes.

## Support for Families

We thank and applaud families for what they are already doing at this difficult time. This resource provides a note of **reassurance, support, and a synthesis of available resources** for parents and caregivers as they adjust to these challenging new times.

## 1. Reassurance

We want to reaffirm the special role of family during this uncertain time. We know that children appreciate being close to their loved ones and having a caring environment in which they feel safe, cherished and valued. We thank parents for being the person that provides security, stability, care and love for children during this difficult time. This is the most important role that parents and family members can play for their children.

## 2. Support

We also want parents to feel supported and not alone as they begin to navigate these unchartered pathways ahead. We have gathered **12 tips** to help parents and caregivers begin to think about ways to support their children to continue to learn and develop over the coming weeks ahead. But we also want to reassure parents that there is no right or wrong answer - you know your children best and know what will work for them. So, follow your instincts and trust yourself.

- 1. Take your time:** You do not need to try to replicate school at home – this is not possible or desirable. Your children's' school may give you some guidance, but it is okay (and recommended) to take time to adjust and prepare your home and your children to understand that it is not a break and that they will need to continue learning in a new environment. Setting up 'learning' and 'working' spaces is crucial for establishing new ways of learning together.
- 2. Progress not perfection:** Talk to your children about their learning and prepare a plan to support them at home, but you may discover that despite best intentions things do not really go as expected. This is fine. Be kind to yourself during this time of 'trial and error' and remember that there is no ready-made roadmap to address the many challenges ahead. Everyone is in this together.
- 3. Accept a new pace:** You do not need to become a fulltime teacher or try to cover an entire curriculum while your children are out of school. In most places around the world, children are not focused on academics for the whole school day. There is a lot of time used in organising children, breaks between lessons and having meals together. Whether the school sends home learning activities or not, your most important role right now is to help children feel comfortable in their new 'homemade classrooms' and help them discover and engage in learning activities that they love and enjoy. This requires accepting a new pace of learning for our children and remaining patient with yourselves in understanding your new emerging roles as facilitators and supporters of learning and development.

4. **Create a daily routine as a family:** During times of crisis, one of the major stressors felt by all individuals is the disruption of daily routines and the fear of the unknown. Children especially need a daily routine that is flexible, but consistent so that they can focus and transition easily from one activity to the next. Such a routine should contain time for revision or new learning, physical activity, leisure (cooking and playing games), family time (and household chores) and rest (including bedtimes and naps). Becoming comfortable with a new daily routine can take a few weeks or more. This is fine. It is important that the daily routine is co-developed with all family members and is seen as a 'work-in-progress' that can always be improved, together.
5. **Be mindful of attention spans:** Older children can usually focus on an activity for 45 minutes or more. Younger children (pre-primary to early primary age) often engage in learning activities for no more than 20 to 30 minutes. Babies and toddlers may focus on an activity for 5-10 minutes. To help concentration try to build quiet intervals into your family routine and give yourself dedicated time to support your children during their hours of attentive learning. Remember independent learning and self-discipline are also important skills to encourage - children need time to figure things out *on their own*. This pacing will take time to manage and negotiate; that is okay. Being respectful of children's needs requires being respectful to yourselves – you need quiet time too! Be patient and know that everyone is in a process of adjustment.
6. **Get daily fresh air:** Where possible, breathe in the fresh air as a family. Take walks or just play outside. Fresh air and sunshine can clear the mind and you can de-stress and relax together. As you know, sunshine is critical for Vitamin D which is important for our health. If your family is unable to leave your home, open the doors and windows to let the fresh air inside.
7. **Keep exercising:** Physical movement and exercise is so important to keep the immune system strong and ensure overall health. Taking at least 30 minutes a day to do some sort of exercise is a gift to your bodies and your overall family happiness. It allows a complete break from electronics, the news, and the pressures of the day. Some form of aerobic exercise will help you and your family members de-stress, gain a renewed positive spirit, and feel you have accomplished something. Whether it is walking, dancing, or beginning a new fitness routine as a family, exercising will really help improve everyone's wellbeing.
8. **Take time as parents for yourselves:** Many parents and children are home all day. It can be hard to juggle household chores, work responsibilities, childcare, and learning activities - all taking place in close proximity with others. Even if it is for 30 minutes, it is important for each parent or caretaker to take time, daily, for themselves and relax. Reach out to your friends, talk to your family members and consider starting or participating in new parenting social circles. And don't forget to eat, yourselves, as it is sometimes easy to miss a meal during these busy days!

**9. Limit screen time:** If electronics and internet are available, it may be difficult to limit children's screen time. But it's important to try to do so. If children need the electronics for their schoolwork, allow it. They can also use electronics to chat with friends, family, and play games with themselves and others. If they are watching a movie or television show, it may be helpful to ask a few questions and integrate the stories from what they are watching into your offline conversations and activities throughout the day. However, it is important that children, especially younger ones, are not on screens for most of the day. It is not good for their health and development (i.e. eyesight, ability to sleep and brain development). Younger children especially need social interaction with others (siblings or parents) for their overall brain development and personal well-being. It is also critical that parents keep a watchful eye on the content of the sites and the social media channels their children are accessing.

**10. Children are learning all the time:** 'Less is more' when it comes to introducing new learning activities with children and young people. If something can be simplified, simplify it. Children learn from everything in their environments including from your behaviour. What happens at home might be different to what is taught in school, but children (and adults) will be learning important lessons and values from this experience. Remember, being at home may be an opportunity for all of us to learn new things in new ways – things they wouldn't otherwise be possible within a formal classroom environment. Developing independence and self-motivation is important too, so invite your children to learn and play on their own as well with other family members. Model how to be flexible, patient, kind and creative during these difficult times. This is a perfect time to focus on cementing values like generosity and tolerance.

**11. Talk about COVID-19:** It is important to talk to your children about COVID-19. Give them space to tell you what they already know or have heard from others, the news or friends. Be honest and respond to their questions as best as you can. If you do not know the answer, that's okay. If you need content about COVID-19 for younger children, we have provided a link to new children's books and other resources about COVID-19 in the attached resource bank. It is also very important for you and your children to take a break from constantly checking the news and build 'COVID-19 free' time into your routines.

**12. Learning to be grateful together:** When people are going through hard times, one thing that can help them feel better is learning to be grateful for what they have rather than fixating about what they do not have. Children can be encouraged to focus on the positive by writing (or drawing) about things they are grateful for and doing something kind for each member of the family every day. Parents can also do this for their children. These moments can help remind us to celebrate, love, and enjoy one another during this difficult time. After all, learning to be grateful together may be one of the greatest lessons of all.

### 3. Synthesis of Learning Resources

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**Global resources:** Over the last few weeks, many organisations working in education and early childhood development have provided new 'distance learning' resources for families to use in response to COVID-19. We have provided links to **10 websites** that you can access.

**Online resources:** We understand, though, that it might be overwhelming for parents and caregivers to sift through the various sites and find useful, free, and engaging content. Therefore, we compiled a 'short list' of **35 online learning resources** that are practical, curated, and hopefully fun for you to use. The list is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, but is a start for families in need of some new ideas with limited time to search through websites.

**Offline resources:** We also understand that many families do not have access to online resources. Furthermore, many of the online resources are not in the languages of our respective contexts. Therefore, we have also provided **25 tips for offline learning activities** that can be done with family and regular items around the house.

We hope that the provided resources will be helpful to families in the weeks ahead and look forward to working with you to generate more context-specific tips, activities and resources over time.



## Appendix

### Activities and Resources for Learning at Home with Children

OFFLINE & ONLINE IDEAS DURING COVID-19





## PART I

# 25 Offline Learning Activities & Resources

### Family Time

- Plan surprise acts of kindness:** Encourage your child to plan one, secret surprise act of kindness for another person in the family throughout the week. Ask them to do so without being discovered and then enjoy the reaction to the kindness.
- Connect and learn from relatives:** Invite your child to interview older relatives or neighbours (maybe by phone) to describe what they remember about growing up when they were the same age as your child. Encourage children to make a book, a drawing, or even a play to share these memories with others.
- Make and send 'I Appreciate You' notes:** Encourage your children to make a card, draw a picture or write note to relatives (neighbors or friends) who do not live with you saying what they value about the person. Send the note/drawing via regular mail a WhatsApp photo, text message, Facebook, or E-mail; it can help increase positive spirits for those living alone.
- Cook meals together:** Preparing a meal with your children over the course of the day is a great way to spend time together; especially learning new recipes. Cooking encourages children to take responsibility and collaborate with others. It is also a great mathematics activity where children of all ages can learn about measurement and sequencing.
- Support family members' personal goals:** What is one personal goal that your child hopes to complete this next year? In what ways could others in your family help your child's efforts? Talk to your children about your own goals and ask how they can help you, too.

### Fun Activities in the House - Learning in Mathematics, Literacy and More

- Create 'obstacle courses' and 'homemade forts':** Encourage children to co-create an indoor obstacle course using household items, designing different 'learning' and 'doing' stations along the way. These could be academic challenges such as singing math facts or writing a special poem; but could also require children to crawl under chairs or walk throughout the house like an imaginary animal. Here is a video about one parent's [indoor obstacle course](#). Think about what you can use in your own house to make your own! Children will love it. And what about building homemade forts or cubbies with blankets and pillows and old boxes - they make great reading corners.
- Host family 'treasure' hunts:** Create written or spoken clues for your children to search for various items in the house leading to an ultimate 'treasure'. Children can also create treasure hunts for other family members – instructional writing and sequencing are important skills. Click [here](#) for a sample. Other ideas can be found [here](#) such as 'Math Hunts' or 'Shape Hunts'.

8. **Play 'I Spy' games:** Play 'I Spy' with your children looking at things around your home or outside. Think about giving clues related to shape or colour or measurement not just initial sounds. Talking through these connections can be very powerful. Click [here](#) for inspiration about ten different ways to play 'I Spy'
9. **Start a Family Word Jar for new vocabulary:** When you read or tell stories together, write the words that are new to your children on pieces of paper and place them in a Family Word Jar (FWJ). Return to the FWJ at dinner, or other times throughout the day, and pick out a word to practice together. Have fun as a family making phrases or sentences with your FWJ vocabulary.
10. **Put on puppet shows:** Invite children to use old socks or other items from around the house to create homemade puppets and put on a show. See [here](#) for a variety of ways to create homemade puppets and encourage children to prepare sets, costumes, and even songs to perform for the family.
11. **Act as a journalist:** Talk with your children about what journalists do and suggest they interview grandparents, parents and friends (over the phone if not in the same place) about their day or their experience with COVID-19. Have them turn what they discovered into a written article and/or ask them to present the interview as a news briefing for the family.
12. **Sharpen your memory:** This memory game is great for anyone who has learned their alphabet and one the whole family can join in. Start by saying, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing..." followed by something that you can eat that begins with A, such as "...apples" or "...artichokes." The second player repeats what the first person said, but adds a food that begins with B. "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing apples and bananas." Click [here](#) for suggested ways to play this game together.
13. **Sing together and learn new songs:** Explore and share new songs together as a family, you can even make your own instruments or write new words to familiar tunes.
14. **Resurrect games of yesteryear:** Have children learn games from older family members and practice drawing, sewing and crafts that were the pass-times of parents and grandparents
15. **Burn energy with 'Stop and Go Games':** Involve children in the "Red Light, Green Light" game where they 'freeze' in motion (Red Light) and then are instructed to move in fun ways (Green Light) such as walking like a chicken. Rotate between children and adults leading the game. Click [here](#) for ideas of a number of variations.
16. **Challenge family members with 'Simon Says':** Host a family 'Simon Says' game, rotating family members calling out different fun directions. Click [here](#) for 101 ideas of what to say. You can of course replace Simon with another name. Try playing the game in different languages.
17. **Try hand-clapping games:** After washing your hands, encourage children to learn new handclapping games. Click [here](#) for two clapping ideas: [Tic Tac Toe](#) and a game called [Sevens](#). Encourage your children to make their own and teach you!
18. **Create using materials around the home:** Using blocks or materials you would recycle (i.e. boxes, milk containers), create new cities, houses, or musical instruments. Invite children to use what they have made to tell a story – see [here](#) for an example. Click [here](#) for five more simple ideas to help the whole family learning fun with normal items around the house.

- 19. Set up a Store/Market/Restaurant in your house:** Pretend your home is a store or market and add have children add price tags to various items. Talk about why some things are worth more than others. Turn your regular dinner time into a restaurant experience and encourage your children to be the waiters/waitresses (and vice versa). Design fun menus with prices. Rotate roles: caretaker, shopkeeper, customer or chef – you play too. To deepen learning for an older child, invite them to create a marketing plan or investment pitch for the store/restaurant/market to present to the family.
- 20. Play card games:** With a standard 52 card deck, learn to play new card games with children. Click [here](#) for 10 card game ideas for kids and families with easy instructions. Children can also build card-houses and use cards for mathematics or memory games.
- 21. Design and fly paper airplanes:** With any paper around the house, adults and children alike can build and fly paper planes to see which goes the furthest and fastest! Click [here](#) for 45 paper airplane designs.
- 22. Create fun paper hats and play dress up:** Use paper plates with children to create special fun hats. See all sorts of hat designs [here](#). Children can also dress up in old clothes from the adults in the house to add to the fun.
- 23. Make your own dice and play new games:** Use existing dice or learn to make your own with paper (click [here](#) or [here](#) for two videos that can guide you). Click [here](#) for a list of 10 dice games for kids of all ages.
- 24. Move, dance and exercise together:** Encourage family members to share their own fitness routines together and have fun! Even 20 minutes a day makes a huge difference. Click [here](#) for exercise plans for children of all ages.
- 25. Co-create a daily family routine:** Create agendas with children and young people to ensure co-ownership. Click [here](#) some sample flexible, weekly learning routines for families to use as inspiration from Save the Children for children aged 0-6, Kindergarten to Grade 1, and Grade 2 to Grade 6. Also consider looking at a sample of learning materials organized by weekly schedules for children in grades K-5 at 'Hand2Mind at Home' by clicking [here](#).



## PART II

# 35 Online Learning Activities & Resources

### Learning Across Multiple Subjects

1. **Khan Academy:** An online resource for independent learning for all ages. Click [here](#).
2. **Scholastic Learning:** Project-based, week-long learning units for grades K-9. Click [here](#).
3. **Wonderopolis:** Daily lessons of fun, 'child wonder topics' to explore. Click [here](#).
4. **PBS Learning Media:** Curated daily, subject-specific, age appropriate materials. Click [here](#).
5. **YouTube 'Learn at Home':** Curated channels for interactive learning videos. Click [here](#).
6. **YouTube 'PLAY' Series:** 3-minute videos of games to play at home with children. Click [here](#).
7. **Kahoot!:** Create a game show at home with custom or pre-made trivia questions. Click [here](#).
8. **Zero to Three:** Home-based play activities for children aged 12 to 24 months. Click [here](#).
9. **Vroom:** Science-based app providing practical tips for parents of young children. Click [here](#)

### Learning Mathematics

10. **BedTime Math:** Daily, funny, 5-min math word problems for children of all ages. Click [here](#).
11. **Erikson Early Math:** Math-based learning games for children in early years. Click [here](#).
12. **Omnicalculator:** 1032 custom calculators to use mathematics in the real world. Click [here](#).
13. **Photomath:** An app to take photos of maths problems and receive assistance. Click [here](#).
14. **TeachBanzai:** Financial literacy for all aged children. Click [here](#).

### Learning through Reading

15. **Epic:** 40,000 books for children under 12 years old. Limited time for free access. Click [here](#).
16. **Audible Stories:** Access to 1000s of 'read-aloud' stories from Amazon for all. Click [here](#).
17. **Global Digital Library:** Access to free digital books in 48 languages. Click [here](#).
18. **Antura and Letters:** Global app to learn to read; available in 25 languages. Click [here](#).
19. **YouTube 'KidTimeStoryTime':** Curated 'read aloud' children's books in all topics. Click [here](#).
20. **Story Time from Space:** Listen to astronauts reading books from space. Click [here](#).
21. **World Reader:** Storybooks for your mobile device (start with 75 free ones). Click [here](#).
22. **Story Weaver:** Storybooks for children in different languages. Click [here](#).
23. **African Story Book:** Access storybooks in African languages, 700+ in Kiswahili. Click [here](#).

## Learning a New Language

24. **Duolingo:** Learn a foreign language through an interactive, downloadable app. Click [here](#).
25. **CommonSenseMedia:** Curated list of 33 sites/apps to learn a foreign language. Click [here](#).

## Learning about Science and Technology

26. **Nasa Kids Club:** Range of STEM resources related to science and space for children. Click [here](#).
27. **MosaMackScience:** Science/engineering challenges for children aged 9 to 13. Click [here](#).
28. **Coding:** Explore how to code at either Code.org (click [here](#)) or Code Academy (click [here](#)).
29. **TypingClub:** Encourage children and young people to learn and master typing. Click [here](#).

## Learning through Exercise, Play and Exploration

30. **GoNoodle:** A suite of online, fun exercise videos for children, developed by experts. Click [here](#).
31. **Playworks:** A helpful list of children's physical activities for use indoors. Click [here](#).
32. **YoReMi:** A site with yoga activities for children, now free during the COVID-19 crisis. Click [here](#).
33. **ChessKid:** Learn how to play chess and play with others around the world. Click [here](#).
34. **FiveMinuteMum:** 5-minute activities young children can do at home for fun. Click [here](#).
35. **Virtual Museums:** Explore 12 virtual museums that match children's interests. Click [here](#).



## PART III

### 5 Resources to Talk about COVID-19 with Children

1. **#COVIBOOK:** Downloadable children's book about COVID-19 in many languages. Click [here](#).
2. **Red Cross:** A list of advice and resources for speaking to children about COVID-19. Click [here](#).
3. **World Health Organization:** Curated site of videos about aspects of COVID-19. Click [here](#).
4. **WhatsApp Facts:** Interactive app with facts about COVID-19 from the WHO. Click [here](#).
5. **YouTube Baby Shark Song for Handwashing:** Childrens video for hand washing. Click [here](#).



## PART IV

### 10 Websites for Updated New Learning Materials

1. **UNESCO:** Repository offline/online learning websites during school closures. Click [here](#).
2. **INEE:** Repository of offline/online resources for education in emergencies. Click [here](#).
3. **UNICEF:** Resources about responses to COVID-19 (click [here](#)) and online safety (click [here](#)).
4. **Save the Children:** Resources for families to help children learn at home. Click [here](#).
5. **World Bank:** Repository of resources for supporting children learning at home. Click [here](#).
6. **Forbes Magazine:** 101 ideas for supporting children's learning at home. Click [here](#).
7. **We Are Teachers:** 1000+ learning at home resources listed by grade/subject. Click [here](#).
8. **Amazing Educators:** 1000+ crowdsourced ideas for learning during COVID-19. Click [here](#).
9. **Oxford University:** List of recommended home learning resources from the UK. Click [here](#).
10. **ECD Action Network:** List of resources for promoting early childhood development. Click [here](#).