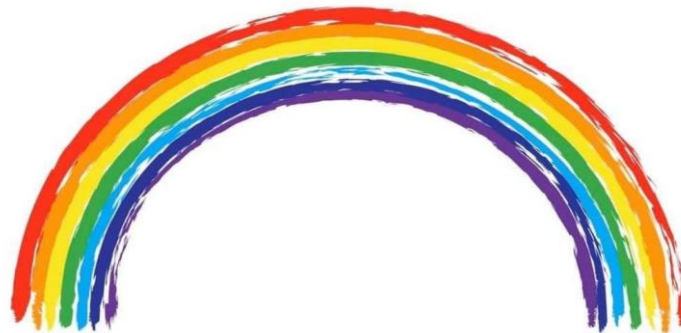


# Home Schooling during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

## A Guide for Parents and Carers



Cardiff Educational Psychology Service  
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The current pandemic has led to parents across the country having to become home educators overnight. They are suddenly finding themselves in the role of parent but also that of head teacher, teacher, midday meal supervisor and caretaker. Whilst all the time trying to look after their own wellbeing and, in many cases, manage the pressures of working from home. The first thing to acknowledge is that it is an impossible task to complete all of these jobs at the same time and, the second, importantly, is to remember that, for children, home is not a school and should remain a child's place of safety and calm above all else.

So, with the recent news that children will continue to be home schooled for the next few weeks, what can help children, young people and their families to continue to manage these difficult circumstances?

### **1. Providing a Structure**

Structure and routine generally make children feel safe. They like to know what is happening and when, so a schedule or routine can help with this feeling of predictability and security. If you are using a schedule, the following things are worth considering:

- Make sure children get up and go to bed at roughly the same time
- Ensure everyone has regular meal breaks, together if possible
- Make time to be active during break and lunch times, encourage physical activity (e.g. trampolining, walking the dog, making garden/back yard obstacle courses)
- Talk to children about how they would like to spend their day and negotiate the schedule together. You may notice that, as time has gone on, your child has wanted to take control, giving options and allowing them to choose may help this.
- Build in lots of activities that children enjoy so that they want to complete them.
- You can access a variety of different visual schedules online ([www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk) has some examples and can currently be accessed free of charge)

### **2. Digital Devices and Screen Time**

Balancing the right amount of screen time can be tricky. Electronic devices can help your child to feel connected, to socialise and to learn if the balance is right. It is worth considering the following:

- Put parental control on devices that need to be used for school work and to socialise
- Put daily time limits on devices that are not required for school work or socialising (e.g. PlayStation, Xbox)
- Stop using devices at least an hour before bed
- Play other types of games (e.g. board games, make believe games etc).
- Build in time to read real books

### **3. Keep in Touch with Family and Friends**

Friends and family are a valuable source of support for everyone at this time. Even when it is not possible to see people face to face keeping connected is very important. It is worth considering the following:

- Set aside time to connect with your child's friends (e.g. video chat, write to them or talk about them during the day)
- Set aside time for adults to read with younger children (e.g. grandma reading a story virtually or over the phone)
- Encourage children to write a diary or draw pictures about what they have been doing and share it with family members
- Encourage family members to become involved in your child's learning if possible (e.g. can they set them a task virtually?)

### **Tips on Home Schooling**

The first thing to remember is that although children and young people are in school for around 6 hours a day they are not 'working' for all of this time. They also spend time playing and socialising with their friends. Children do not need to be sat at a table being 'taught' from 9am to 3pm.

Research suggests a simple rule for figuring out how long a child can concentrate. Multiply the child's age by 2-5 minutes. So a four year old would be able to concentrate for between 8 and 20 minutes at a time.

There is also research about the total amount of time per day that a child should spend receiving direct instruction (i.e. more formal learning)

#### **Children aged 5-7 years**

Children in the Foundation Phase are going to need help to complete their work, they will benefit from a schedule and will need a predictable routine as they do not have the skills to organise things for themselves. They will not be able to stay in their seats for long and will benefit from adult support while they are working as well as regular movement breaks. Children of this age will need lots of praise and reward to stay on task and may also need tasks to be broken down into smaller steps or have instructions repeated several times.

Children aged 5-7 years benefit from between 1-2 hours of instruction per day.

The rest of their day should involve them learning through other means; playing, watching, reading, playing board games, cooking, art and crafts, gardening etc. All of these are learning opportunities and are vitally important for children's growth and development.

#### **Children aged 8-11 years**

By Key Stage 2 children will be more independent in their learning but will also need more opportunities to socialise than younger children. They will need ways to virtually contact their friends built into their day. They will also need a balance of support and direction with encouragement to complete some tasks independently. As with younger

children, they may need adults to break down tasks as well as organise them and will also need lots of praise and regular breaks.

Children aged 8-11 years benefit from between 2-3 hours of instruction per day.

When you are trying to encourage independence, it can be difficult to keep track of your child's understanding in relation to what they are learning. Children of this age will benefit from talking about the tasks they have completed as well as answering questions as this will allow them to demonstrate what they have learned.

### Young People aged 11+

The majority of high school pupils will be able to participate in and, in many cases, plan a schedule of work for themselves. They may need less organising but they will still need plenty of encouragement. It is important to remember that young people in this age group are prone to mood changes anyway and these circumstances are likely to exacerbate this so try not to take moodiness too personally.

Young people aged 11 years and older can benefit from between 3-4 hours of instruction per day.

### **If your Child is Struggling...**

Recognise what level your child is at and do not try to push them past their limits. Schools differentiate work according to young people's developmental stage rather than their chronological age. There may be tasks that are designed for your child's age group that are currently not appropriate for them. If this is the case try the following;

- Contact your child's teacher, they will have lots of ideas about how to simplify an activity and break it down
- Work from where they are and not from where their age says they should be (stage not age)
- Take into account the way in which your child learns best, do they do better by talking, doing, seeing etc.
- Take into account your child's personality, interests and strengths
- Create a home school schedule based on your child's attention span not on the amount of work sent by your child's school
- Look at the learning objective not the task. Can you achieve the same learning in a way that is more motivating or engaging for your child?
- Try and avoid becoming frustrated if your child is experiencing difficulties. It would be more beneficial to leave the task and come back to it at a later date when you are feeling calmer
- Do a project on something they are interested in to keep them motivated
- Help them to make and write their own books – story books, factual booklets, a recipe book including their favourites recipes, this will give lots of opportunity for measuring, sequencing and illustrating
- Encourage your child to design and then build a model of something out of junk
- Support them to keep a diary/ photo journal of life during the pandemic and the eventual return to school

### Other Things to Remember...

- You are not restricted to school hours – do tasks when it suits you and your family
- Add in lots of breaks
- Reading, singing, talking and play is all learning
- House-work and cooking can all be valuable learning experiences (e.g. reading, measuring)
- Use the information, advice, support and resources that the school are providing, they will know about what a child of your child's age can manage
- Your child will struggle to learn if they are feeling anxious, stressed and frustrated. Your child's emotional well-being is most important at this time –try relaxation strategies and talking to them about how they are feeling.
- Reassure, praise and reward your child as much as possible to develop their motivation and self-esteem
- Try and use this time to have fun with your children and try and help them to remember this as a time when they felt happy and not anxious.
- Be kind to yourself
- You are not alone. You can get further support from your child's school and the professionals who help them

If you would like to consult with someone over the phone or via email, because a child, young person or family appears to be struggling at the moment, please contact the Educational Psychology Service, via your child's school, to discuss your concerns. You may be able to engage in a telephone consultation with an Educational Psychologist where you will be provided with support, guidance, ideas and resources or signposted to a different agency/service. The name of the child does not need to be provided.

