

Learning Together

Finding a rhythm to your new 'day to day' as a family

Hello. I am Bea Stevenson, the Head of Education at Family Links: The Centre for Emotional Health. This ten minute clip will look at 'Learning Together, supporting you to find a new rhythm in your day to day as a family.

In our family relationships we find ourselves, unexpectedly, in new territory. Partners, children and siblings are sharing space and time 24 hours a day: living, eating, thinking and learning together. Some parents may be continuing to work from home at the same time as wanting to be active in 'home schooling' their children. This is likely to bring up a whole range of feelings, challenges and opportunities.

You may be used to juggling many plates in your life but this is a whole new level. We have all built structures around our daily lives that we have taken for granted- the school day between 9 and 3, our commute to work, our ability to pick things up from the shop on our way home, conversations with friends or colleagues in person, activities and meet ups at the weekend...and now this has all been thrown up in the air- the ways of working as a family you had in place don't feel as relevant and need to be reassessed.

As a starting point, if you can, it is great to talk to the children about coronavirus – and what it means for you as a family. There are some useful resources to help you do this (Mind Heart) – which help you to then discuss the different feelings that members of the family may have around coronavirus and how it is affecting our lives.

So. How **do** you feel about your current set up? (At home, with the family, also working)....

There may be times when the challenges feel overwhelming, and other times when you see the many silver linings. It is useful to keep checking in with these feelings as much as possible, for yourself, and for your family. At any point during the day or week you might go from optimistic, to fearful, to angry, to hopeless. And these will swing with the number of responsibilities you feel you have on your shoulders right now.

Particularly when these responsibilities feel overwhelming it might help to return to thinking about what is actually in your control. Personal power is the emotional strength that we can use to get our needs met and to make choices in our lives. This is more important now than ever.

An important part of this new situation we all find ourselves in is the ability to let go: Let go of the things that we can't control and make active choices about the things that we can. Are there aspects of your response to your new situation that you can let go of? Another way to support yourself, and your children, to do this, is through relaxation – perhaps putting your favorite peaceful music on, closing your eyes and encourage yourself and your children to focus on your breathing, gradually making it soft and slow.

Parents also suddenly feel like they need to replace teachers. Whether they wanted to or not, talk of parents 'home schooling their children' is the new norm. The number of children's resources that have been made free, and the innovations of many organizations to bring their support online is fantastic, but can also feel overwhelming. How can we start sifting through the opportunities, feeling



that we are able to support children in their learning whilst also finding a balance with play and self-led learning? All at the same time as continuing to do a good job at our day jobs....

A good place to start is to think about the expectations you have of yourself and your children. In this uncertain time, we need to pay attention to how we are feeling and be careful not to expect everything to continue as it has been. Children in particular will enjoy the space to play, to follow their own interests and to be at home with you. What opportunities for play/reflection/ relationship building can we take from this time? At the same time, children thrive when we have appropriately high expectations of what they can manage, and will enjoy following a routine and continuing with some of their school work.

One thing that may help you manage your own work with looking after your children is by building a structure to the day. Who needs to work? Does someone need to nap? Is there school work to be done? Start with thinking about food and snack times- everyone loves their day revolving around these! Then add in broad periods of time for types of activities (e.g. creative/physical/exploration) – build up a bank of these. Each morning children can choose from your bank of activities- a level of autonomy and choice is more important now than ever! Add Post it notes each day on general flip chart so you're all signed up for the day.

Sometimes the best laid plans are worth ditching, when you 'check in' with how you are all feeling emotionally and whether it is a good time to be learning, or working. Are the children fully engaged in what they are doing- are they feeling energized and have they taken it to the next stage? This could be an opportunity to follow their lead- and play!

It might also be practical reasons that force you to be flexible with the timetable. Perhaps you have got a phone call that you need to take for work which means their snack needs to be earlier? Outdoor play is also really important wherever possible- even if it just means running/jumping jacks/skipping around the block. Whether it's raining cold and windy or sunny and light, you will all thank yourselves for time outside.

If we are lucky enough to have the internet, technology can be an incredible resource during this time. The number of resources that are being offered for free, and with excellent learning opportunities (such as the new google capacity to have alternative reality straight into your room with a number of wild animals, shown here), interactive visits to museums and zoos, free drawing, phonics and number apps as well as PE classes- but they are all on screen. For all of us, movement is so important! Try to intersperse some hands on, creative, making of things (water and washing up liquid, old egg and cereal boxes, flour, vinegar and baking soda!) with the use of these excellent online resources.

So; our top tips for finding that new rhythm as a family? First, all feelings are valid. Keep coming back to how everyone in the family is feeling, ideally on a daily basis. Make sure that you are kind to yourself and your children in terms of what everyone can manage during this time- there's a lot to juggle! Build a structure to the day that works for everyone but try to make sure it can be flexible too! And finally, things are bound to feel difficult sometimes. Try to communicate honestly and calmly when they do, always returning to the feelings. Good luck!