



Home-schooling is a difficult task for both parents and students. While schools are closed due to the coronavirus crisis the responsibility of educating children has fallen upon parents. Balancing schooling your children with working from home and other daily activities has proved a challenge for parents across the nation. In order to support parents during lockdown, we have written this chapter on home-schooling from our own experiences of working at home, with the advice of mental health experts, parents, and teachers. The aim is to make the home-schooling experience a more realistic, successful and enjoyable one for parents, their children and any other people who get involved, such as grandparents.

## Academic Work

The most important thing about home-schooling is routine. When a child is at school, they generally stick to a strict timetable, waking up and going to bed at a similar time each day, and it's a good idea to stay in this routine. For your child to be able to work effectively, they need to be able to keep to in a school routine. It will give them the sense of being comfortable and secure as if they were at school, which will help their focus. If it is possible to impose a schedule or routine at home this would be strongly advised. Studies have showed children respond better to routine or timetables when they are imposed. It will allow children to have break times in the same way they would at school while also understanding when they need to focus on work.

When home-schooling your child, the work itself does not have to be stringent or demanding at all. Many schools may well be setting base work for students to work through and expanding on this is always a good principle. If you can encourage your children to reach outside of these subjects as well by reading or researching a topic that interests them. This would not only enable them to grow as people, but also understand more about what they enjoy. Many children do not have the opportunity to pursue academic passions at a young age so there is a great chance to do so during this lockdown.

When it comes to the specific academics of home-schooling do not be afraid to ask your



school for advice. The curriculums for all key stages are widely available online and these can provide a useful starting point if you're trying to directly teach your child. For those in primary school, often it is about key skills, so mainly focus on Mathematics and English, but also explore other subjects with them – you never know, you may well discover something new yourself! The content they will be studying is

most likely things that you will understand so you are able use that to your advantage. Techniques you can try are art and craft activities, creating games, dressing up and role play.

For senior schools, projects can be a great idea to employ as they allow independent work. Many schools are setting students projects to work on with constrained titles. If you are looking for something to motivate and energise your child, set them a project on something which you know will interest them, or help them come up with one themselves. If they are working based upon that interest then they are more likely to respond in a positive way to your project and should enjoy the academic rigour.

Some senior schools will be giving clear directions on the work that should be done. Some schools are hosting online lessons and setting homework as normal; hence your focus should be on the pastoral side with the child in this situation. However, if you are struggling with the school's work do not be afraid to use your own. If your child is a GCSE student, look up the specification and use their textbooks to help them to understand the topic. It might seem like an arduous and painful task for your child, but the most important thing is that they can take the time to think about their work and their future. Inevitably, there are going to be challenges arising from the difficult time when it comes to examinations. Teachers are more than willing to engage with students who want support and you should encourage them strongly to do this. Academic work can also be used to keep a child busy. If you can encourage your child to work hard academically this will benefit seriously them in the long term.

## **Outside of the Home Classroom**

### **Leisure Activities**

Whilst work may be the primary focus, we would also urge parents to make the most of the time they can spend with their children. Each parent will have different constraints due to work commitments, but by taking your child for a walk, run or cycle ride on most days, this is a high-quality way to ease the stress of work. Exercise is a great way to add routine and structure to your day while also providing other benefits. In our books we talk about the importance of having a break, and exercise is a great way to provide this as it also releases endorphins. Using your surroundings, whether it be urban or rural, is a great way to make the most of this time.

As part of the new routine that you establish, it is also important to support your children in leisure activities. If they are young, help them to set up socially distanced meetings with friends or family within the government regulations. Take advantage of these measures as they become more liberal and therefore help to smooth the transition back to normal life. Although it isn't always possible to meet face-to-face with friends, by coming up with a creative version of leisure activities, you and your children can relax and make the most out of the situation. Play different board games, colour, watch new films TV shows and try new exercise regimes. All of these will provide variety and will keep them engaged. We cannot stress the importance of variety enough: too much of the same can lead down the path to boredom.

Another key part of the timetable is having set times for non-academic screens. Many students are working online at the moment and are having excessive amounts of screen time. By limiting the amount of screen time (for example, on PS4 or Xbox), you will help to keep your child healthy, whilst still allowing them some time for relaxation and socialising. Many books will tell you not to give your child any screen time but we disagree with this. It is important to give balanced amount of screen times to interact with friends and to relax. This has been stressful for many students and the best way to ease the stress is to relax. Screens are an important way to relax but they are not the only way: there are plenty of other things you can do including exercising, reading and board games. It is important to include a variety of activities in a child's schedule to make this process as enjoyable for them as possible.

Building on the idea of routine, it could be worthwhile to integrate household chores into the routine. Many students while at school struggle to find the time to do chores and learn practical life skills. Encouraging children to take on household responsibilities will ease the pressure of parents working from home and teach them how to become more independent. Learning to cook, learning to clean and even simple things like doing the washing up will benefit a child in the long term (and who doesn't love baking?!). These are skills that they will need when they move out or go to University and now is a good time to learn and develop them. It is also a way to help keep children busy and could be integrated as part of a reward system. For example, every hour of chores your child completes is an hour that they are allowed to play, watch TV or play video games. This method will produce some results, especially with younger children.

## **Relationship**

Whilst routine is crucial, it is also important to prioritise effective communication, as this is something that is difficult to maintain at this time. Many children are feeling isolated with the lack of social contact despite the modern wonders of FaceTime and Zoom. Children are not interacting in the same personal and humorous way as they were either at the beginning of, or before, lockdown. Try to be understanding of your child's situation as far as possible. Whilst not condoning poor behaviour, it is important not to take it personally. Teenagers in particular are incredibly sociable and crave social interaction with their peers. Not being able to fulfil this need is stressful, and your teenager will be trying to battle with this on top of their normal hormonal mood swings. If you can create a mutual understanding or respect for each other the relationship will function better. It is important to accept that children will be frustrated, angry or even upset during this process, as they may not have seen their friends and family for months. It is a traumatic and uncertain one especially for those in exam year groups or those expecting to make transitions to new schools.



Speaking to your child in a fair and just tone will benefit them. The lack of endorphins from sports or social contact also might make them feel down. To preserve a child's mental health, it is also worthwhile teaching them some key breathing exercises which are outlined in our

earlier books and we will be posting on the forum. Ultimately when communicating with your children, work with them. At this time, you're often spending more time with them and it is about creating a relationship. Give them space as well as giving them your attention: it is about finding a balance.

## **Diet and Sleep**

Food and diet are also vital during this time. Having been at home for a period of months many students will be used to a home diet, where it can be easy to dig into snacks at any time. If either you yourself create different meals or your children make their own, you can begin to explore new cuisines and improve your physical health. We have already stressed the importance of variety and we will stress this again as it truly (and literally) does make a difference. A more varied diet will make a difference to your child. Equally important is encouraging your child to hydrate as much as possible. Drinking the equivalent of 6 to 8 glasses of water a day is the NHS-recommended guideline. Don't forget that fruit and veg are also a great source of water! Hydrating is essential, particularly when your child has been working on a screen for the majority of the day: there's nothing that disrupts concentration more than a headache.

This brings us to an important topic, which we must stress: the importance of sleep. A sleep routine is one of the most quotidian things during a school week; by imposing one on your child it will benefit them. It does not have to be the same sleep routine that you have at school since you don't have to commute. This does mean that marginally later bedtimes are allowed, make sure that your child is still getting the NHS-recommended amount of sleep time (8-9 hours for secondary school, over 9 hours for primary). We cannot highlight enough how important this is and how much it will benefit your child in the long term.

## **Conclusion**

As a final note, you and your child can get involved in community or charity initiatives which you may not have done before. There are so many volunteering schemes online, and giving something back to your community by baking, donating or giving time you will make a difference and feel worthy, especially in this time of need for many. Finding something your child looks forward to doing every morning will help to keep them enthusiastic and engaged. This will make the difference in the long term. We appreciate that there are many people in need right now, therefore we are choosing to support Oakleaf Enterprise, a mental health support charity based in Guildford who assist those who feel isolated and alone with their mental health problems with wellbeing activities and one on one chat support. We would encourage anyone who feels able to donate to this charity. Team Vertex will be donating some of our profits to support this important cause.

Please donate at: [https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/donation-web/charity?charityId=1006744&stop\\_mobi=yes](https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/donation-web/charity?charityId=1006744&stop_mobi=yes)

You can discover more about Oakleaf Enterprise at: <https://www.oakleaf-enterprise.org/>

We understand that lockdown is a tricky situation for everyone, and home-schooling brings with it a multitude of challenges. We hope that our suggestions, ideas, commentaries and

guidance have provided some comfort and reassurance to you in these times, and that you have picked up a few ideas to try. If you have found this information useful then please do donate to our chosen charity, Oakleaf Enterprise. Finally, please get in touch through [The Forum](#) on our website to let us know us what you have found useful and to give suggestions on how we can improve our home-schooling guidance.

TEAM VERTEX



Below are several helpful links where you can find great ideas for home-schooling:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize> Learning resources for all ages

<https://www.q-files.com/> An illustrated encyclopaedia where you're guaranteed to learn something new

<https://nrich.maths.org/> Excellent site for maths for any student

<https://sciencebob.com/category/experiments/> Fun science experiments to try at home

Buy '11+: A Parents' Guide' <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/313063188767>

Buy '1-9: A Parents' Guide to GCSEs' <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/313063174605>