

Working from home with kids when you are self isolating

Midlothian Educational Psychology Service

- Take it in turns
- Teach what schools will struggle to offer
- Help your child feel safe, connected, accomplished
- “Ask don’t tell” with teenagers
- Take a healthy approach to tech
- Duvet days
- Keep your kids informed

Staying in their home may feel like a strain on children and teenagers, especially if one or more adults who look after them are working from home. Try to think about ways to make family lockdown an opportunity.



“This unprecedented scenario is very much a teetering explosion within a family. Or, the collectiveness of the family will help heal all those times of tiredness and stress, when families don’t see each other and have grown apart.”

Deborah Parker

- Work from home adults should concentrate on their children and not let work take precedence. When children feel ignored or unappreciated this can lead to negative behaviour, conflict and playing up and your family relationships may feel overwhelming. Try to work in shifts, take turns with the children, and set aside time to chat (or complain!) each day, in a room away from the kids.
- Avoid taking on a teacher role if it causes tension. Your job just now is to boost their immune system by reducing stress hormones and looking after their physical and mental health. Eat well, sleep well, exercise and laugh a lot.
- View the enforced break as an opportunity for some child-led, personalised learning and life skills, which most schools struggle to offer. “Let’s write down different things that you could use this time to learn, do and experience”. Each morning, put a schedule together. Now is the time to learn how to light a fire and knit a square.
- Children are likely to miss their typical routine, their chance to connect with their community and their opportunities to be successful and feel like they have accomplished something. Children need roles, identity and productivity, even from the age of 3. One way adults can help even young children to feel productive is to give them opportunities to help out with housework or cooking - learning to make a cup of tea, putting pasta in a bowl or drawing a picture for someone so they feel connected to the people they miss. Even if that picture never gets sent, because you are self-isolating, the child’s moment of connection by doing the activity can help their emotional resilience.
- Teenagers may miss their friends and, due to their adolescent brains, feel invincible from the virus. Teenage brains are wired for experimenting, with lesser ability to weigh up long-term outcomes. If they impulsively decide to take risks, it’s worth explaining why the guidelines need to be followed. Try an “Ask, don’t tell” approach with your teen. “What do you think about the reasons for self isolating?” “What do you think the consequences of you meeting up with your friends might be?” If they do sneak out, don’t turn it into a big deal. Instead, just talk with them gently about why it’s important that they don’t do it.
- Don’t try to try to punish your child by taking away their tech. We have to be careful not to let them become too isolated, we all know this has an impact on people’s mental health, particularly for young people. Encourage them to keep connected to their friends virtually, in a healthy way.
- Kids should be allowed a few “duvet days” where they can do whatever they want. That way, they may be more willing to take a structured learning approach on other days and be ready to learn a new skill. You could say “You are so lucky, you are one of the few groups of pupils ever to get this opportunity. How are you going to use it?” Teens may not yet have realised that, in the future, universities or employers may be asking them how they spent their time off.
- It’s important to keep children informed about the developments of in the wider world and how this is affecting them. Children will manage better if they are told what is going on than to be given the news that someone they loved passed away because of corona virus.