

Quarantining with Kids

For parents, self-quarantine due to COVID-19 means keeping the kids quarantined at home, too. The COVID-19 pandemic has closed or transitioned school online, and extracurricular activities have been paused or cancelled. Keeping kids indoors, away from friends, or motivated to do school work can be a challenge, but there are ways to make quarantine a positive experience.

During this time, it's important to talk with your kids about COVID-19, the importance of social distancing and self-quarantining. Start by asking your kids what they know about COVID-19 and what is going on. This will give you a starting point for how to talk with your child about the virus. When talking to your child about COVID-19, it's important to be honest about what's going on, but in an age appropriate manner. Allow your child to ask questions and, if you don't know an answer, say so.



Kids might have a hard time understanding why they aren't allowed to go to school or see their friends and family outside of the home. Explain what social distancing is to your kids and why it is critical in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Get creative with how you demonstrate social distancing using a measuring tape or chalk marks on the sidewalk to show the distance of six feet. It also is important to remind your kids that these changes are not permanent.

Talking with your kids about social distancing is a great time to reinforce important hygiene habits such as:

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, and throw the tissue away after. If tissue is unavailable, cover mouth completely with the inside of your elbow.
- Wash your hands with soap and water while singing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands, particularly eyes, nose and mouth. If you have to touch, wash your hands before and after.
- Stay six feet or more away from others.

Keep Daily Routines

Quarantine at home with your family is the new norm; however, it's important to keep daily routines as much the same as possible for your children. Consistency and structure helps reduce anxiety and stress in children. For children that are already experiencing anxiety, creating a schedule and sticking to a routine can help them feel more secure knowing what comes next.

Don't feel like you have to fill every moment with a specific activity. Scheduling blocks of time for "quiet time" or "kids' choice," where they can choose their creative (ideally non-electronic) activity is helpful and children look forward to this time. Create a daily schedule for your kids to follow that mimics a normal day and continue to make plans, like connecting with friends and family virtually, to create structure.

"In addition to daytime routines, it is critical to maintain consistent bedtime routines and sleep schedules,"

explains Lisa Meltzer, PhD, a pediatric psychologist at National Jewish Health. Such routines might include powering down technology 30 minutes before bedtime, having a consistent brief bedtime routine (e.g., snack, brush teeth, read for 15 minutes, lights out), as well as a consistent bedtime and wake time every day.

Dr. Meltzer also says that it may help to have a gratitude or daily joy journal that you and your child fill out at the end of the bedtime routine to help reduce anxiety and focus on positive aspects of being home together.

School from Home

Homework has taken on a whole new meaning as kids transition to online classes or programs. A few tips to help students succeed at home include:

- Designate spaces around the house for each child to set up their “school desk.”
- Encourage classroom-like guidelines such as limited cellphone use, set lunch time, etc.
- Follow normal routines around getting ready for school.
- Create time for physical activity.

Get Up and Get Moving

Quarantine does not mean stopping all physical activity. Parents and caregivers have the opportunity to be creative and connect with their kids through fun, physical movement.

- Create a circuit in the backyard or on the sidewalk with chalk. Each stop can be a new activity, like jump rope or squats, with running or skipping in between.
- Get out and take a walk or run with your kids while practicing social distancing.
- Take a bike ride around the neighborhood. Always remember to wear a helmet and follow the rules of the road.
- Use activity or fitness apps, or take advantage of free online fitness classes.

Extra-Curricular Activities

While your kids may not be participating in after school activities, that doesn't mean they shouldn't stop all after-school play. Keep your kids active with activities like puzzles, board games, crafts such as coloring and painting, science projects, or cooking and baking.

Family Time vs. Personal Time

Being at home all day with your family may seem like the ultimate family time, but school and work activities do keep family members separated. It is still important to take time to reconnect as a family away from work and school. Just as important as family time is respecting the need for personal time. With the family confined to the same square feet, creating space to allow individual family members to be on their own is important for mental health.

Keep in Touch Virtually

Between the internet, smartphones, tablets and laptops, it can be easy to keep in touch with friends and family. Instead of playdates at the park, plan time for kids to reconnect through video-chatting. Instead of lunch at a restaurant with the grandparents, set up a virtual lunch date through video calls for the family. Take the time to call a friend or family member instead of sending a text to reconnect. Now is the time to let your kids teach you how to use video chat or even Snapchat.

Emotional Well-Being

This period of time is difficult for children and adults alike and it is good to talk about it. Keep in mind the developmental and emotional differences of family members and keep the discussion at a level they can

manage and process – that may mean different discussions with different family members. Remember that families all over the world are experiencing similar challenges, and National Jewish Health has resources that can help support and guide you.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

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