



Newnham St Peter's C of E Primary School

Learning together achieving forever

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Dear Parents,

As we move towards more and more families being asked to stay at home, possibly in quarantine, I would highly recommend reading the article below (published by the BBC today).

“Whether you’re living in a massive six bedroom house or all sharing a smaller two-bed flat, we’re all going to feel the walls closing in a little bit more,” says Eloise Rickman, who runs courses on home-schooling.

Feeling cooped up might be just one of several potential knock-on effects as more families self-isolate together following the coronavirus outbreak.

The government’s current advice is that if anyone develops symptoms, everyone they live with must self-isolate. And although schools are currently open, the government has warned closures might be necessary in the weeks ahead.

Among the families already in quarantine are Annie Ridout, 34, her husband and their three young children. Two of her children have developed symptoms.

“It’s a very weird time,” she said. “We are focusing on getting through it and being as upbeat as we can.”

Ms Ridout, who teaches online courses for freelancers and entrepreneurs, says she has created a daily schedule for her school-age children.

“An hour of maths, my husband has been doing that in the morning. And then an hour of reading and writing. There will be creative time, artwork, and then time in the garden, digging and getting muddy. And that will be it.”

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She says originally she planned a schedule with 30-minute chunks, but it’s now less rigid and more focused on ticking off tasks each day. “We had to loosen up in terms of accepting they are going to watch telly,” she says.

Ms Rickman, from south London, agrees that a schedule is important - especially for children who are already at nursery or school and will be used to routine.

“Children really thrive on predictability, especially when life is changing around them,” she says.

But the 31-year-old, who already home-schools her children, stresses that any schedule should be more like a “flow” - rather than something strict.

She suggests creating weekly or daily activities and then read the plan out or “stick it on the wall”.

"Maybe Wednesdays have a family film afternoon. Or give teenagers some private time to Skype their friends," she suggests.

Educational psychologist Zubeida Dasgupta also stressed the importance of structure, from her home in Brighton and Hove where she and her family are also currently self-isolating.

"We know when people are faced with uncertainty or worry, having some certainties, for example through a bit of structure, could really help," she says.

"Although on the face of it, some children may feel excited by being off school, the reality is weeks - or months - on end playing Xbox and watching movies may not be as fun as we think.

"It's about getting a balance - having a structure and integrating some fun," she says. "It might be helpful to think about how we distinguish weekdays and weekends."

In terms of schoolwork, some schools and teachers have already spoken about the possibility of setting work for pupils to access online.

The current health crisis is certainly a "unique situation" for schooling, says Ms Rickman.

"For parents who are suddenly plunged into it, I think it could be a challenge."
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But she adds: "I have had a few messages from families who said they have always wanted to try home-schooling and are looking forward to doing it for the first time."

She says the most important thing in home-schooling is family relationships. A lot of siblings will not be used to being together all day, and "that's a lovely opportunity to build and strengthen your family relationships - but it will come with some bumps in the road".

She suggests parents try and carve out some one-on-one time with the children.

Thinking about the environment is also important, she says - but "this is not about setting up a classroom in the living room".

She suggests making spaces for children to do arts or craft - for example covering a coffee table with newspaper and arranging pens in mugs - and even moving furniture.

"If you don't want the kids looking at the TV for five hours a day, think do we need to rejig the furniture? Do we want to think about pushing tables back so the kids have space to run about, especially if you have a flat."

"This is a time we need to prepare for our houses to be a bit messier. Having kids about all day, it's going to get messy."

And she says learning at home is not simply replicating school at home. It's not necessary to do six hours of learning like in school, she says, as lessons will be one-on-one and so more intense.

At Newnham St Peter's I have been particularly struck by how important routine is for our children. Please do plan in schoolwork routines with your children at home, combined with plenty of opportunities to play and stay fit and healthy.

As parents and carers please remember to take time to look after yourselves.

As a whole school family it is important that we continue to support each other and this includes regular communication. If your children are not in school please do keep in contact, we would love to hear all the positive news as well as being there to help.

All the best,

Anne Nolan