

Helpful tips to make lock down easier.

With schools and nurseries being closed, and lockdown now in effect, parents are faced with the daunting prospect of keeping their children entertained for hours on end, while simultaneously keeping them fit, healthy and educated. Not to mention that some of you may still need to work from home. Here are some tips that may help.

Develop schedules and routines: We are creatures of habit and routine. Research shows that liking routine in our everyday lives is present very early in life. I know from talking to parents recently that children are asking about going to nursery and missing their friends and the routine they are used to.

During lockdown it is best to determine a loose schedule of how the next few weeks will go. Ensure you include time for learning activities, self-care, household chores, relaxation and most important, fun! If you have school-aged children, teachers will be providing learning plans. As parents, it's important you do what you can to support your child's learning environment. For children who attend our nursery, we are using our Facebook pages and posts to suggest activities similar to the ones we do in nursery but are suitable for doing at home, mostly by reducing the mess but also using resources you are likely to have at home. Using our Connect software we are keeping communication with parents open and emailing updates and other useful information.

Making chores a fun! Even before a child is two, the EYFS shows they can share resources, help someone in need and work with others to attain shared goals. Finding ways to use these developing behaviours to complete easy household tasks and chores will shorten the days and ensure parents don't have an entire house to clean once the children are in bed! One way is to write down some of the household tasks on small pieces of paper and put them in a jar. Every day, each person pulls out a task from the jar and then, after a bit of training from mum and dad, everyone can go off and do their tasks! I suggest adding in some fun music to really get into the cleaning spirit! For those with quite young children who cannot be left to their own devices, just give them a duster and chances are, they'll follow you and lend their own little helping hands.

Children can play on their own. We know that play is essential to children's learning. Parents do not need to be full-time entertainers for their children. Providing children with opportunities to play on their own enables them to explore their environment and develop their creative skills. Free play also allows children the opportunity (yes, opportunity) to become bored, which is also OK. There are many positive outcomes associated with boredom. Through boredom children learn how to regulate negative emotions that arise when they start to feel bored and learn how to "push through" by seeking out other things to occupy their attention. Being able to cope with negative emotions gives them confidence that they can solve problems. Lastly, when children experience boredom they get the space they need to use their imagination and find creative ways to entertain themselves.

Physical isolation does not mean social isolation: Children are social beings. Being unable to leave home does not mean that you and your family cannot have new social experiences, we just have to get creative with the form these new experiences take. By taking advantage of today's technologies such as Skype, Google Hangouts, or FaceTime we can keep our social connections active. Arrange "virtual" play dates with friends where the children lead the interaction, you might be surprised how social children can actually be through technology! I know some parents have done this, with great results. You might just need to help very young children figure out where the camera is! For parents with older children, keep in mind peer relationships are critical to a child's social, emotional and cognitive development. Ensure your child has time and the space to connect with their friends.

Physical activity is important to maintaining health and wellbeing: Although we cannot go to our local leisure centre and our children cannot go to their regular activities, it is important to keep our health and wellbeing in check by finding other ways to stay physically active. There are many things you can do in your home to stay active as a family. Check out YouTube for family exercise resources. Playing hide-and-seek in the house is a fun activity, or if you have space run outside the house a few times. Fortunately, the weather is being kind to us, so take advantage and go for family walks or bicycle rides. However, if you venture beyond your house, avoid contact with public surfaces (e.g., no playground equipment please!), remember to wash your hands with soap when you return and give others adequate space to respect social distancing whilst you are outside.

Have fun, take care and stay safe.