

Play Activities to Support Children's Learning and Development.

Parents and carers will be struggling to know how to support children as they stay at home during the Coronavirus crisis. The information in this resource provides some guidance and suggestions that can help. Many of the activities suggested here are aimed at supporting young children to learn and relax through play and other activities. However, the ideas and activities will also be helpful – and fun - for all the family, no matter what age!

This is a work in progress and updates will be added during the coming weeks.

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1. Planning Your Day

To start with you should try to make a plan and structure for your day. This is really important as it provides reassurance and predictability for young people as well as those caring for them.

Develop a routine that everyone sticks to, e.g. getting up time, getting ready, breakfast, then –plan the rest of the day! It helps to involve your children in the planning so they feel part of the plan.

The activities to include will very much depend on the age and the school demands for the young person. Schools will be producing learning packs and activities for children. Most young people will need support to help make a work plan. DON'T try to create a full school timetable - this will probably cause both you and the children added stress. Perhaps plan activities for core subjects such as literacy and numeracy in the morning, and keep the afternoons for more 'creative' or 'relaxed' learning activities.

BE FLEXIBLE! You should keep a basic routine and a structure, but your activities can always be changed. Perhaps plan activities a day at a time. You will find out what works best by trial and error. 'Getting up time' will probably be later than normal. It's ok to give children, especially teenagers, a 'duvet day'. – They, as well as you, will be stressed and may need some time out.

Creating your timetable

Appendix 1 gives an example of a worksheet that you can use to create a timetable of activities for children.

For some children it might help to use pictures. '**Sparklebox**' contains lots of pictures that can be downloaded (see below).

<https://www.sparklebox.co.uk/class-management/routines-organisation/visual-timetable/daily-timetable.html>

Other useful links

The '**School Closure Toolkit**' developed by the Illinois partnership is another good source of pictures and ideas. This is a toolkit that has been developed for children with autism to use during the COVID-19 school closures. However it is a valuable resource that can be used to support parents to structure any child's day at home.

http://l.lead.me/bbTE3n?trackSharing=1&fbclid=IwAR1hah84nonxVeg47As8inEHwxxQJLkpxE8NPJhZ_uGyFyC-erUM5G40eZw

'**Priceless Parenting**' is great source of free printable charts for children and parents.

<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/chart-for-kids>

News articles providing good advice on home-schooling

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-51959957>

<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-homeschooling-five-ways-to-keep-your-kids-learning-happy-and-healthy-11959988>

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/mar/22/family-isolation-guide-for-parents-teenagers-coronavirus-lockdown?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

For advice on how to support your child's overall wellbeing

Here is some additional information that has been provided by our educational psychology team:

<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/article/10122/Mental-health-and-wellbeing-advice>

Finally

We are social animals, and positive relationships are fundamental to our happiness and wellbeing. Our children in particular during this time may need extra reassurance that they are loved and cared for.

Remember! We are also complex social animals and with the best will in the world we don't always get it right. We make mistakes, sometimes lose patience, and that's OK. As long as we understand this, make allowances for everyone, and most importantly take time to repair any fall-outs. This is particularly important during this difficult time. Your children will be stressed. You will be stressed. But you as the adult have the power to make things better, perhaps with just a hug, a smile of understanding, an apology if needed.

You may at times need all your patience and your negotiating skills when tensions arise. But often if your children feel upset just listening and acknowledging how they feel, and showing you care, may be all that's needed.

2. Learning Through Play

'Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills' (Learning through play, Unicef, 2018)

Play provides opportunities for a child to actively engage, explore, experiment, and learn from peers and adults. It helps to promote the development of a whole range of cognitive and social /emotional skills, as well as higher order thinking skills.

The following suggested activities have been grouped as far as possible into the main areas of development they focus on. However, each activity taps into a range of additional skills.

Many of the activities here are well-known 'old-fashioned' but tried and tested games and activities. The Internet provides a wealth of such ideas (see links in the Resources section at the end).

The inspiration for this blog and many of the activities came from the book '*The Mister Rogers Parenting Resource Book*' (Fred Rogers, reprint 2005) ²

2.1 Activities to help develop cooperation, sharing and kindness.

Overview

We all have a concept of 'me' and 'mine', and often sometimes as adults we can find it hard to share!

So it's no surprise that most children have trouble sharing, not because they are spoiled or unkind, but because they have a very strong sense of 'me' and 'mine'. For a child, giving a favourite possession or toy to someone else for a while can feel like giving up a part of 'me'. But by watching others and being guided and helped by caring adults, children begin to develop an understanding of the reasons why it's nice to share and be kind to others and they begin to develop empathy.

Ways to help your child to share.

Have some agreements. Giving the child some control over what he or she can share can help. Children can choose to have a designated toy or toys that are their most loved possessions and they don't need to share them unless they decide to. This is understood and agreed between siblings. Or the child can put their most treasured possession away if a friend is coming round.

Use a kitchen timer to help children take turns. The great thing about this is it's 'bell' telling the children when to share, not the adult.

It's ok to offer a 'long turn' before they share. Help the others to wait by offering a different activity, perhaps by joining in too. '*Peter take as long as you like with that car and Susie will wait till you're finished. Susie would you like to play with these farm animals until Peter is done?*'

Talk through any difficulties. When struggles happen try explaining to the young people what the problem is, without blame, and try to help them to problem solve. '*OK we have two boys who both want the same thing here. Peter you pickled this up and than Susie grabbed it from you. Peter you tried to grab it back and now you're both crying. What should we do?*' It's also important to ask how each child is feeling. This helps not only to acknowledge individual feelings but also to help the children understand another's feelings and develop empathy.

Help children with their own feelings by showing empathy. Acknowledge that it's OK to be upset and that it's hard to wait.

'Catch them being good'. Look for ways to praise the child for things you might take for granted, e.g. *'Well done Susie for sitting nicely and colouring in.'* Try to be specific with your praise *'How fantastic, you've managed to complete four of these and they look really nicely.'* Try to involve them in the process: *'So what are you going to do next?'* or *'Well done Peter how did you manage to do that?'*

Use teachable moments. Notice and point out to children when someone is sharing, or being kind (in a story or in something you are all watching).

Activities

1. A silly folded paper

What's needed:

A sheet of paper

Pen, pencil, marker



- Take a piece of paper and fold into thirds so that only the top half is showing.
- Without letting the others see, one person draws the head of an animal or person on the top third. They then fold this back underneath to hide it.
- The next person draws the middle part or "body". They then fold this back so that only the bottom part is showing.
- The last person draws the legs.
- Unfold the paper and see the silly picture!

Picture taken from *The Mister Rogers Parenting Resource Book*²

You can adapt this idea. One person makes part of a drawing then hands this over to the next person who makes another part to the drawing. Then your partner hands it back to you, or the next person. Keep going until the drawing is complete.

Working on: *fine motor skills, imagination, appreciating other's ideas, cooperation and taking turns.*

2. Create a silly story

One person says a couple of sentences, then the next person tells the next part of the story, etc. You can set a time limit or a sentence limit. Try to make the story silly and light-hearted (young people can be easily spooked by scary stories!)

Working on: *imagination, appreciating other's ideas, cooperation and taking turns, language skills.*

3. Mirror images

What's needed:

A partner

- Have the partners stand in pairs facing each other as though they were looking into a mirror.
- One person starts as the leader. He or she makes a move and the other person copies this movement (as a mirror copy).
- At an agreed point, change roles so that everyone has a chance to be a leader of follower.

Taken from *The Mister Rogers Parenting Resource Book* ²

2.2 Activities to help develop language

1. Read a story.

Children love listening to someone reading them a story, no matter what age. You could encourage older children to read to younger ones.

2. Listen to an audio book.

This requires a bit more concentration than listening to a person right in front of you telling a story. However, with practice children will get better at listening and it can be very relaxing for children. Parents can also help by interacting with the story as it goes along.

AUDIBLE is offering **free streaming** of audiobooks for kids (and adults) for as long as schools are closed. Explore the collection and start listening!

<https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

Working on: Listening skills; understanding of language; vocabulary; imagination

3. Play the game 'associations'

- One person is chosen to go first. Everybody keeps time by clapping slowly and counting out loud with each clap of five. But on the fifth clap they just clap without saying anything: *One, two, three, four, clap. One, two, three, four, clap. One, two, three, four, clap....*and so on.
- The slower the pace the easier it is.
- On the fifth clap the person going first says a word, e.g. *apple*.
- On the next count of five, the person going next says a word this is linked to the first word, e.g. *banana*.
- If someone misses their turn e.g. can't think of a word (or says the word *after* the beat), they go out until the next round.
- This carries on until there is a winner.

Rules:

You can challenge if you don't think there is an association. If proved right the person goes out. If proved wrong you go out.

Associations can be tangential but they should be fairly easy to understand.

Example of a round:

One two three four *Apple* one two three four *Banana* one two three four *Pear* one two three four *Socks* one two three four *Shoes* one two three four *Polish* one two three four *Shiny...*

4. Twenty questions

One person thinks of an object and the others playing can ask twenty questions to guess what it is.

Choose between *animal* (alive and breathing), *vegetable* (it grows), *mineral* (not alive and coming from the ground), or a *person, place or thing*.

Decide beforehand: Are answers limited to 'Yes' or 'No' or can they include 'sometimes', 'usually', 'rarely'.

Tips: Don't choose something you don't know much about or else you won't be able to answer the questions accurately. Don't choose something that's too easy or too hard to guess. If you don't know the answer to a question say that you're not really sure – don't make up an answer as this could lead everyone down the wrong track.

5. Do a quiz

Quizzes work on: higher order thinking skills; language skills; imagination; speed of processing

There are lots of quizzes that can be found on the internet. Here is one that will keep the family going:

'Name the movie!'

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=2309296455951724&story_fbid=2538297123051655

6. 'I Spy'

Working on: language; vocabulary; observation; trust and co-operation

One player is chosen to be the Spy, and they silently select an object that is visible to all the players. They then say, "I spy with my little eye something beginning with ...", naming the letter the chosen object starts with (e.g. "I spy with my little eye something beginning with C" if the chosen object is a car). The Spy cannot change the object once it has been chosen.

Other players then have to guess the chosen object. Traditionally players ask directly about particular possibilities ("Is it a tree?"). Once a guesser has correctly identified the object, they become the Spy for the next round and the game starts again. If younger children are playing who are not so good at guessing, the role of Spy can be passed around in a set order.

2.3 Activities to help dexterity, following instructions and visual/spatial skills

1. Origami.

Origami is a peaceful hobby that can be done anywhere, as long as you have a piece of paper.

Here are some links to easy origami videos:

Origami dog

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWVppdfY0x8>

Origami rabbit

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QqBvy_y0_M

Origami lion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3IUSHtxxzk>

Jumping frog

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChrVW4ruOPQ>

Printable templates

<https://www.easypeasyandfun.com/easy-origami-for-kids/>

(To be continued...)

2.4 Wellbeing and feelings

1. Name your feelings

Children and young people can find it difficult to talk about their feelings. You can help children with this by helping them to name their feelings. Giving words to feelings can make the feelings seem less overwhelming or upsetting. And when children can talk about their feelings with a caring adult, it helps them to understand that these feelings are normal and natural and that other people have felt that way too.

- Download the feelings card from the link below
<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/documents/labeling%20your%20feelings.pdf>

If you want to add emojis to the cards you can find lots by doing a Google search 'printable emoji sheet.' Or visit the 'Priceless parenting' website:

<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/chart-for-kids>

- Make up some cards with different situations written on the card. Some examples could be (depending on age):
 - You get something you've always wanted for your birthday (say what that might be?)

- Someone you like but don't know well invites you to a birthday party.
- You have to give a talk in front of the class.
- A friend breaks one of your toys.
- You find out your friends went to the pictures and didn't ask you.
- It's your first day at a new club and you don't know anybody.

(To be continued...)

2. Practice positive thinking

Working on: supporting wellbeing

This is a good strategy to help promote feelings of wellbeing and it's even more important to try doing this during these difficult times.

The link below provides some suggestions. An additional question that could be asked before children they go to bed is 'What's the *best* thing that happened today?'

<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/documents/positive%20thinking%20for%20kids.pdf>

2.5 Developing imagination

2.6 Working on responsibility

2.7 Science and movement

2.8 Creativity

Appendix 1

Timetable

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Morning					
Lunchtime					
Afternoon					

Resources mentioned:

1. *Learning through play*, Unicef, 2018. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf>

2. *'The Mister Rogers Parenting Resource Book'* (Fred Rogers); Published by Running Press, 2005. Now out of print but available through some online booksellers

Links to ideas for old-fashioned games:

<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/activities/fun-old-fashioned-games-and-rules/>

<https://childhood101.com/good-old-fashioned-outdoor-games-for-kids/>

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/educational-language-games-for-infants-and-toddlers-2162699>