

Keeping Kids Occupied While You Work

I must start by acknowledging the challenge faced by parents juggling parenting with working from home whose day typically starts at 5 am and ends at around 11 pm. This is definitely not an easy task. Quarantine and social distancing means that outdoor activities for children are a strict no-no. We don't know for certain when this will end or what our new normal will be, but as we continue to stay indoors and work from home while taking care of our youngsters, it's vital to find time to do things we love. While television and electronic gadgets can keep children occupied for hours, too much screen time will hamper their language, posture and cognitive development. While we as adults can cope with the drastic change in our lives, children with their creative and free minds and energy find it difficult to pass their time constructively. They can easily get bored.

A few lifestyle modifications can be useful. Here are some suggestions which could be incorporated in your lives:

1. First and foremost make a daily plan of activities.
2. Plan board games such as scrabble, carrom, monopoly and so on.
3. This is the time to plan activities that include all family members such as the elders of the house.
4. Help children to pick up a hobby with online lessons such as singing, dancing, drawing or playing a musical instruments.

Engage children in activities at home. This can inculcate values of love, helpfulness, gratitude, respect, etc, it will also make children sensitive to needs of others and make them responsible and independent.

1. *Kitchen Activities:* This is an easy activity you can do with children at home. Whip up some quick, lip-smacking snack with your children's help and bake or cook some delectable dishes. I'm sure children will feel included and happy to make something new.
2. *Reading:* This is a good chance to inculcate love of reading in children. Take time out to read with children if they are too young to read by themselves. Those children who are old enough to read by themselves, encourage them to read more. You can discuss various characters in the book and the lessons and values which they may have learnt through it.
3. *Art and craft:* Children, due to their limited vocabulary, express themselves through various forms of art. They enjoy painting, sketching, drawing. Recreational activities and games which can be incorporated at home like treasure hunt or I spy and such can be played with children. Using craft as DIY activities can be used to add change or a new look to a room. Best out of waste can be one of the ultimate craft activities during the quarantine phase.
4. *Hone a new skill:* This is a great a time when children can explore new hobbies. Help them get on a learning routine. Musical instruments and singing are fantastic for creative brain

development along with being a lifelong gift to your child. Children can be taught basic stitching or shoe painting which can be novel and fun.

5. *Selective online watching:* A few years ago, television was the only source of entertainment for children. But now, the internet brings a host of YouTube channels with interactive visuals and content. Online games and social media though interactive are not fruitful or valuable. It can be a little challenging to identify quality channels. Watching some television channels like Nat Geo, Discovery, Discovery Science or any such Travel or informative shows can be encouraged.

Other engaging ideas for things that children may be able to do on their own include:

1. Building with blocks or lego
2. Drawing with crayons, markers and colored pencils
3. Listening to audiobooks
4. Playing with clay
5. Pretending to cook, or other imaginative play with dolls and stuffed animals

Flexible work hours can be an added advantage. If you have a spouse, work when they are not working and trade off childcare duties. Get creative and stay flexible and you will get more done than you might think. Limits are still important. As the duration of social distancing is uncertain, try to stick to routines. Routine helps having a disciplined lifestyle. Make sure technology use does not take the place of sleep, physical activity, reading, reflective downtime, or family connection.

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