

Coronaschool 101 - Technical Note

Families around the world are facing extraordinary circumstances as we deal with the global COVID-19 pandemic. If you are feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone!

As we face living 24/7 in close proximity to our family members for an undetermined period of time, it is a good idea to have a family meeting to discuss important aspects of everyday life that are (or have potential to become) difficult. As leaders of the family, parents need to have a "team management" attitude in order to rally the kids and get them motivated, focussed and aware of each other's needs. Using an agenda for this meeting (give one to every member of the family) and taking notes will encourage everyone to take this meeting seriously.

The agenda should establish the family schedule. It's a great idea to get the children's feedback to really make them feel part of the team. Once a schedule has been decided on, print it up & post it in key locations where everyone can see it clearly.

- **Wake up & bedtime:** If possible, these should be at fixed times for every family member during the week (Monday to Friday), since this gives some sense of "normal". This is good for everyone's mental health. It will also ensure that everyone is able to stay focussed and get some work done. Weekends should be more relaxed & flexible.
- **Meals/snack times:** These should also be set at fixed times with a list of who is doing what to prepare a meal or do clean-up each day. Make a menu/schedule and post it on the refrigerator. Everyone is happier when expectations are clear. Take advantage of the opportunity to teach children to make weekly menus, to cook and clean up properly. Get a different child to help you with each meal. If they're older, give them the opportunity to cook a meal on their own.
- **Exercise time:** If you're confined to stay inside your house, then create a workout exercise for the family. If children's ages vary a lot, then Dad can do a workout with the older kids and Mom can do another one (at a different time or location) for the little ones. Exercise is very important. It provides an outlet and energizes. If you can go outdoors, enjoy the opportunity to get some fresh air by going for a walk or a run. The outdoors provides a change of ambience and perspective. Consider playing some family sports. Siblings should play outside often.
- **Work/Study time:** Study and work are important, but we have to be realistic. We will not be able to accomplish what is normally done at work or in a classroom. Research shows that the best time to learn is before lunch because that is when children are most receptive. One method is to dedicate 30 minutes of study on one subject with a short

break in between. More information in the “Homeschooling Strategies” section.

- If you’re trying to work from home, focus on helping the children in the morning and then doing your professional work in the afternoon and evening. You will find that most bosses are accommodating. More information in the “Working From Home” section.
- **Play time:** This is essential because all kids need to play! Remember to join in sometimes and encourage a variety of games, such as: role-play games, dress-up, make a fort, Legos, board games, hide-and-seek, cards, puzzles and the list goes on! Don’t panic if they say they’re bored. Boredom sparks creativity and resourcefulness.
- **Screen time:** During this pandemic it’s important for us to be really patient and flexible with the use of screen time. Parents don’t need to feel guilty if they use screens to keep kids quiet during important meetings but it’s something else altogether if a child has spent hours and hours on screens and has not done much else. The goal is to be reasonable in exposure to screens. Of course, most children/teens are receiving schoolwork online during this pandemic which is a good use of technology. Technology is very important to teens because it allows them to feel connected to their friends. Parents should be understanding, but there should be limits and a curfew. They need sleep. No screens in the bedroom.
- **Cleaning time/chores:** Since we’re in isolation, this is a wonderful opportunity to teach your kids the basics of home management: how to cook and bake and BBQ; how to prepare a weekly menu; how to clean bathrooms (and the rest of the house!); how to do laundry & fold clothes etc. In fact, we really need their help. It’s very important for children to see both parents taking an active role in the home and sharing the tasks. When things are kept in order, it brings a lot of peace and reduces the sense of being overwhelmed.
- **Quiet time:** Every family should have a designated “quiet hour” every day at the same time for everyone’s mental sanity! We know that patience is running thin at times, so having a set quiet time can really help everyone. There should be no screens during quiet time, but there are lots of fun quiet things that can be done: reading, puzzles, writing a story, writing a letter/card to a friend or grandparent, colouring, crafts, drawing a comic strip, activity books (dot-to-dot) etc. Children can be encouraged to keep a journal documenting this unprecedented time in history. If you need a nap, take one! If you have an important meeting, schedule it for this time since you know that everyone will be quiet.

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- **Family time:** Although there are many challenges at this time, it's also a tremendous opportunity. In Chinese tradition, crisis = opportunity. Take advantage to really get to know your children. Have interesting conversations with them that you normally don't have time for. Be interested in their interests. See what makes them tick. Take advantage to explain things about your family history. Tell your kids about how you met each other. Write down some notes about grandparents & great-grandparents before people forget or they are no longer with us. It's very important to stay connected to the extended family: grandparents, aunts & uncles, cousins etc. Enjoy family meals and try to do a fun activity together at least once a day. This could be playing a board game, watching a documentary/movie, playing cards, playing charades, playing a game in the backyard. The possibilities are endless. Time to be creative!

COMMUNICATION: Communication is so important in every aspect of our life, whether it's in our family life or in our professional life. We always need to try to communicate more effectively in respectful, kind and clear ways. This sounds easy, but it's often not easy at all. How often do people misread the tone of a comment, an email or a text? How often do teens misinterpret the facial expressions of their parents? Communication is very important and when it's done well, it brings peace and happiness.

Between spouses: No matter what our circumstances or stressors, this is a time for spouses to be gentle and kind with each other. It's a time for being respectful and patient and believing that the other wants the best for us. It's important to make time to be alone together and talk. If your spouse is irritating you, you need to find the courage to tell him or her in a kind way. Choose a good moment to discuss these types of issues...not on an empty stomach or drinking! Find healthy ways to cope. This is not a good time to rely on alcohol or other substances that might make your interactions and communication more challenging.

Keep the romance alive. Get the kids to bed on time, so that you can relax and enjoy each other's company. Considering feeding the children first and then prepare a separate candlelight dinner just for the two of you. If throughout this pandemic you have been treating each other as best friends, then the romance will be easily kindled.

Parent-Child: During isolation, parents may be butting heads with some of their children (or all of them!). This is often due to different temperaments (see Appendix on FDC website). Parents should strive to see this pandemic as a unique occasion to get to know their children and see them as they are. You might notice a problem in your child's behaviour. Don't worry. Take note of your observations and begin to discuss with your spouse helpful ways to address these issues you're seeing. Use the chart on the FDC website to take note of your child's temperament, strong points and weak points. How can you help them to grow up to be a kind, responsible person, who thinks of others?

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In our current situation, negativity is all around us, so we need to be positive. We want our children to be cautious, keep physical distance from others and wash their hands, but we don't want them to be fearful. If our finances are tight, we can tell the children that we need to be careful in our spending, but it's important that they not feel "weighed down" or worried about this. Parents should always reassure their children that everything will work out. There are many resources available to help families at this time. Use them if you need to.

Anger management: Parents will probably notice that their patience has been stretched thin. Parents need to take care to stay calm and not use inappropriate/aggressive language or actions towards their children/spouse. No matter how great a parent you are, you may find you've reached your limit at times. Try to identify the common triggers for your anger. When you can identify those triggers and situations that make you or your child angry, then you can make some changes in your environment or your approach. Learn to recognize the early physical signs of anger and walk away as soon as you feel them. Go to another room and engage in a calming activity. Take some time to review why you are angry- with some distance, it might not seem so bad or so serious. Once you feel better, you can go back to your family and address the situation calmly. This is assuming that you are sleeping enough and not consuming any alcohol, etc. If your child is angry, simply say: "You seem angry. Is that how you're feeling?" Allowing the child to express their frustration and anger can already go a long way in helping to diffuse the situation. Despite our best efforts, tempers will be lost and it's important to forgive each other.

Between siblings: Since siblings are spending a lot of time together during this isolation period, it's normal that they can get on each other's nerves. As leaders of the family, encourage everyone to speak respectfully and kindly, because every family member should feel loved. Do not accept name calling, put downs, sarcasm, insults, laughing at, ganging up on a particular family member etc. Of course, siblings naturally like to joke around and tease each other, but since everyone is much more sensitive, this can easily get out of hand. If possible, use humour to lighten the mood. Remind the children that their siblings should be good friends for life. When the parents are gone, they will still have each other and hopefully cherish that bond. Help the children to reconcile after a fight and turn the page.

TEMPERAMENTS: One of the causes for conflicts between family members is different personalities living in confined space. Every person is unique, with different temperaments and coping styles. Some people are more extraverted and other are more introverted. Some people are more neurotic and others are easy going. Patterns get established in relationships that are hard to come out of unless we are aware of them. When we understand people better, it's easier to be patient with them. We can also help them to see themselves as they are and set small goals to improve in some areas. We have created a chart to help you take some notes about temperaments, using the classic temperaments framework. This document is located on the website. Please see the Appendix on Temperaments on the FDC website for details about

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the 4 classic temperaments: sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic. Every temperament has wonderful qualities, but also some weaknesses. We hope this Appendix will help you to better understand your spouse and your children...and why some temperaments can irritate others! There are other personality inventories and frameworks that can be helpful in both the workplace and home and these include the big 5 factor model on personality (https://www.amazon.ca/Five-Factor-Model-Personality-Theoretical-Perspectives/dp/157230068X/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_2?keywords=The+Five-Factor+Model+of+Personality%3A+Theoretical+Perspectives&qid=1588528758&sr=8-2-fkmr0), the Myers Briggs Personality Inventory which is based upon proprietary testing data, and Thomas and Chess's classic view on temperaments and goodness of fit between parent and child (<http://psych.colorado.edu/~colunga/P4684/temperament.pdf>).

WORKING FROM HOME: This is a huge challenge during this time of isolation. Everyone wants to keep doing their professional work. Here are some tips that can help you to work effectively.

- Get showered and dressed before you start work. Avoid working in pyjamas, even if no one can see you on a call. This really does have an impact. It also sends a message to the other members of the family that your work is important.
- Find the best place to work. If you're sharing this workspace with your spouse, tidy up before leaving the workspace to them. This is basic courtesy. If needed, get a box to store your important papers while the other spouse is working so that you don't lose or misplace anything.
- If two are sharing the same workspace, good communication is essential to establish a work schedule that will probably need some flexibility, depending on meetings and your professions.
- Before starting a meeting, remind family members that you will be in a meeting and that you appreciate their efforts in keeping quiet during this time. In other words, thank them in advance for their cooperation. This will really help them to stay quiet! If you can foresee how many minutes the meeting will last, tell the family ahead of time.
- Ask the other parent or older siblings to keep younger children occupied during important meetings.
- Don't stress too much about your effectiveness. Be realistic, these are exceptional circumstances. In general, most bosses are very understanding about the constraints that parents have working from home.
- Stay connected to co-workers, especially those who might be struggling at this time.
- Ergonomics: make sure that you are well set-up to work efficiently. That would include a proper chair, if possible; adjust your screen level by adding books underneath so that it is equal to your eyes and you can keep a proper posture while working. You will reduce the risk of having back issues. Take breaks to do stretching exercises. Having good posture is often neglected at home, but they can have long-term physical effects.

Family Development Canada thanks Gillian Roussy (teacher), Paddy Dupuis (editor), Dr. Kathleen Lalonde (psychologist) and Dr. Tim Lau (psychiatrist) for their contributions to this Technical Note.

HOMESCHOOLING STRATEGIES: Even if you are a teacher, teaching your own children can be difficult. Parents who already do homeschooling will have an advantage in this time of isolation since they already have set schedules and practices, however, even they will no longer be able to attend the sports and other activities that they are used to participating in.

Here are some practical tips to help you:

- One parent usually takes the lead in organizing the children's schoolwork. This can be a daunting task if there are many children/teachers/platforms etc. Do your best. Try to stay positive, even if you feel overwhelmed. This confinement will end!
- Before starting schoolwork, children should be dressed, teeth and hair brushed.
- Younger children should not work isolated in their room, but together at the kitchen/dining room table. Teens can work alone somewhere else in the home, but they might enjoy being at the table with the others.
- Elementary school aged children should be encouraged to do 1-2 hrs of work a day (this can vary if children have learning disabilities or ADHD etc.)
- Try to focus 30 min. on one subject, then take a break and move to another. Consider going outside for a set 15-minute recess, like at school, or playing a game. Some children will work best by task completion instead of time limits. Every family should see what works best for their children.
- If the weather is really nice, allow kids to play longer outside and delay some work to the next day. They need vitamin D.
- Teens will have much more work to do. Parents should make sure that they are neither too stressed nor too relaxed. Some temperaments can be too hard on themselves while others can get way behind in their work.
- Encourage them to use apps that will help them keep track of their assigned work. They should be accountable for getting it done. Studies come before other activities/screens.
- Teens should put phones in "silent" mode in order to stay focussed. One ping decreases their concentration level by 10% and they're not able to get that back.
- Some teens will work better if they have a goal, so encourage them to finish one subject before having a break/gaming.
- Encourage all family members to keep relative silence when a sibling is having a meeting with their teacher. Distract younger children with quiet toys/activities or take them out for a walk.
- Try to keep younger siblings (toddlers etc.) occupied by creating different play stations and getting them to rotate from one to the other.
- Younger children can also do some chores (ex: breakfast dishes, folding laundry) while older children do their schoolwork.

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Focus on solidifying the bases in English (reading comprehension & writing skills) and Math. This applies to students of all ages. Literacy levels & writing skills have decreased significantly. So, take advantage to teach basic things in a very creative way. Here are some ideas:

- Encourage children to read and be interested in what they're reading. Ask questions about the main idea of the story and a description of the main characters. If parents read themselves, this has a big impact on children.
- Reading expands vocabulary, strengthens writing skills and helps to develop other areas of the brain. It's a good substitute for screen time.
- Reading comprehension has a significant impact on their future academic success.
- Give the children an interesting article to read and ask for their opinion. Teach your children how to think and analyze, even at a young age.
- Teach them how to write a letter and address an envelope. This could be a good opportunity to prepare a surprise for grandparents or other elderly persons.
- Get them to type their favourite recipes and make them follow an established format.
- Encourage them to engage in creative writing.
- Create a time capsule about this unique moment in history that we're living. They can include a letter written to themselves in the future.
- Create a writing game where everyone in the family must describe an object in great detail, and the rest of the family has to guess. They must describe the size (general and specific); weight; function; composition (what's it made of); texture; shape; colour; odour and cost. This will teach them all how to organize their writing in a clear way and expand their descriptive vocabulary and sense of observation.
- Useful educational links, as well as suggested reading is listed below.

PERSPECTIVE:

Years from now, we will still be talking about this pandemic, when we were forced to isolate, to social distance, to stay home. How will it be remembered in each of our families? Maybe it will be remembered as a time of security and confidence, of a grand adventure. Maybe it will be the time my brother became my best friend, when I learned to draw a horse, when I fell in love with my spouse all over again.

This pandemic gives parents a unique opportunity for perspective. Remember that stepping back and getting perspective of a situation allows you to have a balanced view. We need to look at the facts, which include the tragic deaths of those affected by COVID-19, while also taking into account all of the positive aspects of this situation, for example, getting to spend more time with your children, which helps to deepen your relationship with them and also to deepen your intimate relationship with your spouse. Let's hope that every member of the family can feel the happiness of being deeply known and understood. No doubt, many families will be more resilient after living through this situation together.

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Here are some useful links to help you in your homeschooling efforts:

[//www.ectutoring.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-E-book.pdf](http://www.ectutoring.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-E-book.pdf)

<https://www.additudemag.com/daily-schedule-coronavirus-home-school/> (for parents with children with ADHD)

English: <https://www.k12reader.com/> and <https://www.lesplan.com/en/publications/what-world>

Math/English grammar: <https://ca.ixl.com/>

Math: math-aids.com and <https://www.dadsworksheets.com/>

French: <http://www.alloprof.qc.ca/>

Here are some recommended books that could help you at this time:

For scheduling, planning and personal growth:

7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey

For communication:

Five Love Languages of Children and *Five Love Languages of Teenagers* by Dr. Gary Chapman

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk and *How to Talk So Little Kids Will Listen*, by Joanna Faber and Julie King

The Kindness Challenge, by Shaunti Feldhahn

For discipline:

Secrets of Discipline: 12 Keys for Raising Responsible Children, by Ronald G. Morrish

For marriage:

Five Love Languages, by Dr. Gary Chapman

For Women Only; For Men Only; and Highly Happy Marriages, by Shaunti & Jeff Feldhahn

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, by Dr. John M. Gottman

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