



## Schools and Daycares closed Indefinitely... Now what?

By Dr. Kiely Williams MD, Medical Director – Advanced Primary Care

I keep hearing the term “unprecedented times” and I think that is accurate. The situation we find ourselves in because of the COVID 19 pandemic is definitely unprecedented in our society. In an attempt to limit exposure, schools and most forms of childcare, have been suspended indefinitely. This measure will likely not be short term. We will be affected by this for many months and possibly longer.

This entire situation is further complicated because some working parents rely on their own parents for assistance with childcare. Unfortunately, those older than 60 are at an increased risk from COVID 19. A virus that generally causes little to no symptoms in children can cause older individuals (especially those with other medical conditions) to require an intensive care unit or worse.

There is no doubt our lives have been turned upside down. The following article contains a few tips and some guidance on how to optimize an incredibly difficult situation. Keep in mind this is a general article that will cover kids of all ages. Much of what I recommend will have to be adapted to the age(s) of your child/children. Additionally, every family situation is different, so these are intended to be helpful recommendations; not rigid expectations. They can be adapted to each family as required. We can expect some days will be harder than others. On those days it is ok to take a “day off”.



### **1. Maintain a regular schedule -**

No one is maintaining a pre-COVID schedule; so what will your new schedule look like? Have your kids get up at a regular time every day. You may not need to catch busses anymore so take advantage. That regular time may be slightly later than usual. Likewise, have them go to bed at the same time every night. If you would normally have a different wake time and bedtime on a weekend there is no need to change that.

### **2. Eat a healthy breakfast -**

Maintaining good general health is very important when there are infectious agents on the loose. Additionally, the situation at the grocery store is “variable”. Consequently, this is a good time for meal planning and talking to kids about not taking more than they can eat and finishing their food (if they cannot finish their food at meal- time they can have it for a snack later).

### **3. Take your vitamin D -**

Children need 400IU of Vitamin D per day. It can be very beneficial to their immune system.

### **4. Home Education -**

The key here is to make it fun. Do not give yourself or your children additional stress trying to emulate everything they would have had at school. Take advantage of the opportunity to explore what you and your children are interested in. Children learn well when they are interested. They do not learn well in high stress situations. There are many on-line home education options for children of all ages. Do not be overwhelmed with choosing the “right” option. Any additional education children receive right now is



more than they would otherwise be getting. This can be anything from a formal home education curriculum, to educational books you have at home that you have never gotten to or even ideas from pinterest, google and blogs. We do not need to add any additional stress to an already stressful situation so have some fun with it.

Some school boards are working on on-line/distance learning options. As much as this situation has turned our lives up- side down this may be a once in a lifetime opportunity to interact with your kids in this way. If we approach this as an opportunity to connect with our kids, and discover how they learn best, our children may come away from a potentially traumatic experience with a few good memories of dedicated time with their parent(s).

Additionally, because you will have one of the smallest class sizes and best teacher student ratios ever, you can do an entire instructional day in 2-3 hours!

### **5. Fresh Air and Exercise -**

This is critical for surviving with kids at home for prolonged periods of time. Children need a minimum of 1 hour of activity per day and more is better. This helps with mood, sleep and behaviour. Hopefully we have passed most of the cold weather. Children will primarily be playing at home and in their back yards. Additionally, social distancing is relatively easy on small hikes in the woods or mountains.

### **6. Minimize screen time -**

I understand this may seem like the easiest baby- sitter but it will come at a price. More than 1-2 hours of screen time per day can cause poor sleep, low mood, irritability and behavioural challenges. There is a caveat to this... virtual playdates! As we are social distancing we still need to connect as humans. We are fortunate to be in an electronic age where we can stay connected with grandparents, loved ones and friends through FaceTime.

Additionally, I would caution against violent video games. These are never a good idea for developing brains. This is especially true during high stress situations and environments.

## 7. Chores -

Minimal screen time, home school and chores likely sound like torture to children. However, choosing 12 age appropriate chores for children to do around the house a few days a week gives them a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, it helps them develop a work ethic and allows them to feel responsibility and a small amount of control in a situation that seems out of control to them (and us).

### Example Schedule:

**08:00:** Wake and get ready (brush teeth, get dressed, make bed). Healthy breakfast, clean kitchen.

**09:00-12:00:** Home Education. (With younger children this can be split in 1/2 in the morning and 1/2 in the afternoon. It will mostly involve reading, letters, colors, craft, etc). For older children (High school students will likely need longer): 30 min Math 30 min English (writing and literature) Snack break 30 min Social studies. Choose an area of interest to your children. What do they want to learn? 30 min Science. There are many fun and easy experiments on Youtube.

**12:00-1:00:** Lunch and clean kitchen.

**1:00-2:00:** Outdoor play Depending on the age of your child you may need to add naps during the day.

**2:00-3:00:** Chores. This may only be 30min for younger children.

**From 3:00 onward** is unscheduled time. Most households will have dinner at a regular time and, as previously stated, bedtime routines are important and should remain the same (or as close to as possible).



One final note is on behaviour. There are a number of reasons for poor behaviour. One of them is that children push boundaries to answer two questions: 1. Are there boundaries? 2. Are the boundaries consistent or are they flimsy?

When children know that there are boundaries and that they are consistent and reliable this gives them a sense of security. In uncertain times, children will search out boundaries that will make them feel secure. Many times this manifests as poor behaviour or “pushing the boundaries”. It may be helpful for parents to understand this to avoid becoming overly annoyed with their children. Having consistent rules and appropriate consequences for breaking household rules are actually helpful. Additionally, your children will need more of your time to make them feel secure when many people around them are feeling very insecure.

I hope these suggestions can provide a helpful template for you and your family. Please remember the team at APC is here to support you in any way we can.

Yours in health,

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