



## **Covid-19 (Corona Virus): A Guide for Parents on supporting children and young people with daily routines while schools are closed**

The Government has made a decision to close all schools in Ireland in order to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 virus and keep as many people as possible safe and well. In addition to this, people have been asked to stay at home and to practice social/physical distancing. We have not been in this situation before, so this is new to us all, but if we follow the right advice we will get through this, and in time we will be proud of how we responded and worked together to support our country. This decision has impacted on all of our lives and changed everyone's daily routines.

Some children and young people may be coping well with [social/physical distancing](#) and/or staying at home and completing school work at home whereas others may be struggling with these changes. There will be challenges ahead as your child will miss their friends, school and their extra-curricular activities. We are all in a period of adjustment and it will take time for us to adapt to being at home so much and spending more time together as families. There are things that can help you and your children to get through this challenging time.

During this time children and young people need your support to create new routines that will keep them busy and give them a sense of control of their lives. This will become more important as time goes on. Routines and schedules are key to helping them through this unprecedented phase in their lives. By having a structured and predictable day they will feel more secure and reassured.

Children and young people can help themselves to get through this time by creating a [Plan for the Day](#) every evening for the day ahead, and they may need your help with this, particularly younger children. The [Plan for the Day](#) should include where possible:

- 1. Normal Daily Routines**
- 2. Physical Activities & Housework**
- 3. Social Activities**
- 4. Enjoyable/Creative Activities**
- 5. Schoolwork**



- 1. Normal Daily Routines:** It's important to encourage your child to eat healthily, to drink lots of water and to take care of their personal hygiene.
  - Taking exercise, showering, getting dressed and getting a good night's sleep should be included in their daily routine.
  - Having regular mealtimes as a family, as well as dividing up the day, is a valuable opportunity to connect with your children and allow them to air any worries or concerns.
  - It is important to keep to the normal bedtime routine. Encourage your child to go to bed and get up at the usual time during the week. Sleep is very important for our health and wellbeing and eight to twelve hours is recommended each night.
  - Help your child have a good night's sleep by asking them to leave their devices (phone/laptop/tablet) outside of their bedroom each night.  
*(Remind your child to discuss their plan with you to make sure access to the computer and access to the shower, work for everyone in the family.)*
  
- 2. Physical activity & housework:** Physical activity is important for children and young people's health and wellbeing. Helping others makes us feel good and gives us a sense of purpose. Consider encouraging the following:
  - Timetabling physical exercise into each day. Your child may already have an exercise routine or preferred physical activity. If they don't or are looking for something new, there are lots of ways to exercise, for example, going for a walk or run/doing weights/jumping on a **trampoline<sup>1</sup>**/following an exercise routine on line or by using an App. **If possible try some physical activity outdoors and get some sunshine and fresh air but stay within a 2km radius of your home and with your family only.**
  - Your child may be spending more time in their bedroom so encourage them to take pride in their personal space by taking responsibility for how it looks, they can do this by, making their bed/vacuuming their room/keeping their space clean and tidy.
  - Helping with the extra housework (empty and load the dishwasher/vacuum/ help with the shopping/cooking/washing & ironing/mow the lawn/wash & vacuum the car).
  
- 3. Social activity:** Many young people are finding it hard not meeting their friends. Encourage them to use technology to stay in touch with friends. Our country really needs our support with this.
  - You can encourage other types of social contact by supporting them to:
    - Telephone relatives, family or neighbours who may be lonely or live alone
    - Spend time with the family watching TV together, playing board

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<sup>1</sup> **Keeping your child safe while playing outdoors**



- games/ making a jigsaw or helping with the housework
- Help a younger brother or sister with their schoolwork

#### 4. **Enjoyable/creative activities**, should also be included in the *Plan for the Day*:

- Using the time to try something new or learn a new hobby. Technology/ YouTube<sup>2</sup> can be helpful when learning something new.
- Encouraging your child to try a crossword, draw, paint, write or listen to music.
- Encouraging your child to capture each day by documenting it through drawing, writing, recording or photography
- Write/email a letter to a friend, relative or elderly neighbour.
- Watch a favourite TV programme.
- Share and enjoy fun TikToks<sup>3</sup> with friends.
- Prepare a meal. Bake a cake.
- Read a book.

#### 5. **Schoolwork:**

- For post primary students it may be helpful if their new schoolwork routine on weekdays mirrors the normal school day, as much as possible. One option may be to follow the order of subjects as they appear on their usual school timetable. Another option may be to take a short break after what is the usual length of a class period in school. Some schools are using technology to support students with their schoolwork. If your child's school is doing this, you may need to remind them to check their email regularly.
- Primary school children are usually engaged in 'active learning' when they are in school, which means that they move and change tasks frequently throughout the day. Break up the schoolwork routine with physical activities and creative/ enjoyable activities. Look out for emails or messages from your child's school/teacher. They may be able to provide some helpful support during this time.
- RTÉ Home School Hub is a daily scheduled virtual classroom for primary school children on RTÉ 2 from 11am to 12 noon. It can also be viewed anytime on the RTE Player with online resources available [here](#).
- Sticking to a full schoolwork timetable will not work for everyone. Insisting on one may lead to heightened stress and tension at home, particularly if you have a number of school-going children. Be flexible and sensible.

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<sup>2</sup> www.webwise.ie contains steps to manage online safety in the home.

<sup>3</sup> TikTok has a minimum user age of 13 years-old



What's important is that your child makes a good effort each day to complete some schoolwork.



## Ten Useful Tips for Parents

1. Younger children may respond well to setting up routines and taking your advice and guidance while older children may resist having a ***Plan for the Day***. Remind them that this is still the school term and schoolwork is continuing. **Talk to them about the importance of routine for their health and wellbeing at this time, as well as the importance of keeping up with the curriculum, in preparation for their return to school.**
2. Remind yourself that having to work independently without the stimulus and interaction of teachers and peers is new for your children and may be challenging. While it may be important to support your child to engage with learning at home by using technology, it's not and cannot be exactly the same for your child as learning in school. Your child is likely to be less focused and attentive than they would be in school. **If this is the case, consider helping them to start small and increase their study/schoolwork time gradually. Encourage them to take short breaks between study blocks.**
3. It may be stressful for parents and carers of younger children if they believe that they have to be a 'substitute teacher'. Remember you are not a teacher and there is no expectation that you should be doing extensive hours of tutoring or completing schoolwork with your child every day. **Be realistic and sensible about your child's needs and your own, during this time. Be flexible and open to adjusting to both your needs and your child's needs – do what you can!**
4. **If you have older children in the house encourage them to help their young siblings and build this in to their *Plan for the Day*.**
5. **Remember that learning isn't just about sitting with a pen and paper at a desk. Children can learn through baking, gardening or other activities of interest to you or your family.** For example, baking can involve reading the recipe, following written instructions, learning about weight and measurement and the development of life skills, such as how to clean up after yourself, how to share and how to take turns.
6. As you know every child is different and you may find that your individual children respond to this situation in different ways. That's ok. **If needed, try to support them individually to adjust their schedules depending on their age, additional needs, motivation etc.**
7. **No matter what age, allow your children choices in relation to their *Plan for the Day*.** Choosing the activities and the order in which they engage with



those activities will be motivating and empowering for your child.

8. If your child's first few attempts at the ***Plan for the Day*** have not worked, remember this is a time of learning and adjusting so it may take time to get it right. **At the end of each day, your child may want to discuss with you what worked well about the plan and what was challenging. Help them to think about how it could be improved for the next day.**
9. For many children and young people it may be difficult to stay motivated and focused when working alone at home. This is normal. The *Plan for the Day* will help. **Encourage them to take regular breaks and praise and reward them for working hard and trying their best.** You may need to consider building in a reward or incentive system in order to help them experience success learning at home. Rewards don't have to cost money and can be daily or weekly depending on the age of the child. Examples include choosing a game for the family to play, having their favourite meal for dinner, choosing a family movie or extra phone or PlayStation time etc.
10. This may be a challenging time for families. **Be patient and kind with yourself.** If you can, take breaks during your day, get plenty of sleep, connect with friends and family using social media, exercise and eat well. Remember that the most important thing that you can do is love and care for your child and reassure them that Covid-19 will pass.

**Check out these websites (list is not exhaustive):**

- [HSE](#)
- [Department of Education and Skills](#)
- [https://twitter.com/@Education\\_Ire](https://twitter.com/@Education_Ire)
- [Department of Health](#)
- [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#)
- [National Parents Council Primary & Early Years](#)
- [National Parents Council - Post Primary](#)
- [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)
- [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)
- [Jigsaw](#)
- [Little Things Campaign](#)
- [RTE School Hub](#)
- [Healthy Ireland](#)

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