

Home learning for young children: care, connection, creativity

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Self-care for parents

The world is pretty topsy-turvy right now and children need us to help them feel safe during these uncertain times. It's important to explain the Coronavirus in age appropriate ways, by keeping it simple for pre-schoolers e.g. *'That's right, some people are getting sick with a germ. It makes them cough and sneeze. The sick people are being looked after well by doctors and hospitals'*¹. If you're child/ren are home learning, it's also vital that we as parents look after ourselves to help ensure that we can be present and connect with our children.

Ways to take care of yourself during home isolation²:

- Stay active for physical health – go for a walk or do an online exercise class.
- De-stress for mental health – meditate; limit news and social media intake; take a bath; write in a journal; savour a cup of tea; sit in the sun; listen to a favourite music playlist or podcast; read or watch something uplifting.
- Do an online tutorial to learn something new or create e.g. drawing.
- Connect with friends and family via social media or phone.
- Cook nutritious, tasty homemade meals – experiment with new recipes.



Check updates on walking tracks and low-traffic open spaces that remain open for exercise. Adhere to physical distancing rules.

<https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws-covid-19>



Daily rhythms and rituals

It is essential to maintain daily rhythms **without** rigid schedules and concerns with academics right now. We must take the pressure off ourselves as parents and seize this opportunity to spend quality, slow-down time with our children. Inflexible time-based routines result in stressed children, which can negatively affect connections of neural pathways for learning. Predictability provides security and comfort for young children... but feeling hurried does not. Daily rituals are important coping mechanisms during anxious and uncertain times.

Ways to promote connections through rhythms and rituals:

- Read books together each day. Let children sit on your lap or cuddle next to you. *'Little Possum Stays Home'* is a children's audio story which explores the themes of physical distancing and isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Keep up daily routines of bath time, bedtimes, mealtimes & hand washing¹.
- Allow plenty of free time to play, relax, have fun and be creative together¹.
- Include special family and cultural rituals e.g. playing a favourite game.



<https://wildheartstplay.com/>



Connection with nature for learning

Time spent in nature has been proven to improve mood, reduce stress and ease mental fatigue. Kids who are involved in regular outdoor play benefit from increased flexibility, gross motor skills and improved concentration levels³.

Ways to connect with nature:

- Go for a local walk together as a family. Notice and talk about nature as you collect different objects e.g. leaves, rocks, sticks, bark or seed pods.
- Allow time for children to have unstructured play outdoors in your backyard to promote creativity and imagination. They can design their own fun and learn to approach the world in an inventive way.
- Plant a small vegetable patch together. Talk about where food comes from by involving children in planting seeds and watching them grow.
- Set up a tent in the backyard together. Have a campfire & gaze at the stars.





Home learning through play

During early childhood (0-8years), children learn best through open-ended play. Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, solve problems and imagine⁴. Our role as teacher in the home environment is to build on the knowledge our child/ren already have by connecting through engaging discussions about their play and what they're learning. It is essential to ensure only moderate amounts of screen time and that we focus on connection instead.

Ways to connect through unhurried, engaging, fun home learning:

- Have relaxed reading times together on comfy chairs, with a pet to cuddle
- Make a rod using a stick, twine, a magnet and paper clips and go fishing inside. For older kids - add words, numbers and maths symbols to 'catch'.
- Set up a variety of materials for construction (e.g. pop sticks, blocks, pegs, corks, boxes) and support children's mathematical and problem-solving skills.
- Encourage children to draw a picture and/ or write a letter to send to a grandparent or friend. Model writing by scribing their letters and stories.



Connection through pretend play

Pretend play helps young children make sense of the world and learn about themselves. It is vital for their learning, social, emotional and language development. It requires advanced thinking strategies and communication and is also useful to help children work out confusing or scary life issues.

Ways to connect through pretend play:

- As a family, set up a shop with pantry items, fruit and vegetables. Label food with 'posit-it note' price tags. Parents can take on the shop assistant role while children 'shop' and develop mathematical skills by recognising numbers. Older children can add up the total cost of bought items.
- Set up a Doctor's surgery with a bed, teddies, dolls, bandages, Band-Aids, face masks, gloves, gowns and toy plastic stethoscopes/thermometers. Allow children unhurried time to use these materials and act out real life situations. Rotate taking on roles of doctors, nurses and patients. Add clipboards and paper for older children to write patient information.



Creativity through music

Listening to and creating music helps children learn numeracy, literacy and emotional skills. Music is one of the few activities that uses both sides of the brain (logical and creative) and helps to build important brain connections⁵. It's also a wonderful way to connect and have fun together as a family!

Ways to foster creativity through music at home:

- Sing, listen to or make up songs and nursery rhymes together.
- Move and dance to different types of music e.g. pop or classical.
- Make simple percussion instruments. To make a set of maracas: (i) fill two plastic drink bottles with seeds or buttons and secure lid; (ii) cut a paper towel roll in half across the middle; (iii) then cut each half length-wise; (iv) use hot glue gun to secure rolls to top of drink bottles; (v) glue paper towel roll back together; (vi) decorate handles with coloured tape/contact.
- Watch the 'Hand Washing Song' by the Wiggles on YouTube and the 'Play School: A Covid-19 Special' on Facebook (ABC Kids Community page).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJD9zPv2NmM>

We're all in this together to stay well. Please help stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Stay home and keep washing your hands.

⁴ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>

⁵ <https://au.reachout.com/articles/10-ways-to-take-care-of-yourself-during-coronavirus>

⁶ <https://www.natureplayqld.org.au/15-benefits-of-going-out-and-engaging-with-nature-for-kids>

⁷ https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf

⁸ <https://www.earlyyearscount.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/age-spaces/many-benefits-music/>

- 'Be still and keep growing'

