

Some tips for homeschooling

1. Give yourself a break – it's likely you are not a trained teacher and even if you are, you may not have experience of teaching your children's age range or the breadth of subjects. For most topics you will be discovering and learning alongside your child and this is the best way! Ask them to teach you. (I am loving finally learning what a subordinate clause is from my daughter in year 4 ☺.) They will not cover as much of the curriculum as they would in school but relax – nobody will. This can be a time to build your relationship with your child, to play together, laugh together, dance and sing together (if they'll let you) and just be curious about the world. There will also be tough times. You and your children might feel anxious and stressed and miss other human interaction. That's okay. Acknowledge their feelings and yours, have a hug then get on with your day.

Also, literally **give yourself and your children breaks**. Schedule these in and make sure you keep to them. Remember that at school they have roughly 30 minutes of free play each morning, and a full hour around lunch. For your breaks, you might be lucky enough to have the support of another adult so you can get out / run / go to a shop / read your phone. Many of us will also be using a screen-based babysitter and can only manage an uninterrupted toilet trip / brew / breathe out of the window. **Prioritise self-care**. You will have much more energy and enthusiasm for homeschooling.

2. Structure your day – Most children (and adults) will find their anxiety levels reduce if they know what's coming up (hence list additions and calendars). Reduced anxiety means that your child is more likely to engage in learning rather than resist. If your child has additional needs, chances are you are aware of the types of structure they will need, and you may wish to have a visual timetable. Timetables that are negotiated and agreed might work better but this will depend on the child. Making the timetable could be done at a set time e.g. after breakfast or the evening before if you need a higher level of structure. **Elements of choice and control** are essential – within **your boundaries**. Your child's school may have suggested some activities – you could give your child a choice over which one to do each day. You might want to include a balance of activities like exercise, learning, screen time, talk-based activities, and free play. Record this in a way your child finds accessible, e.g. written on a whiteboard or piece of paper on the wall (see examples below), or more visually with photos or pictures on a visual timetable. **Depersonalising the demands reduces conflict** – instead of saying “now you need to do your writing” you can say “what does it say next on our list – oh it's letter writing, what equipment do we need?”

3. Build on your interests as well as theirs – everyone has things that you always wanted to find out more about, whether it's identifying and foraging for wild food, learning to play the keyboard, photography, making your own cheese; now is your chance! Your children will soak up your enthusiasm and love of learning and be inspired to find out more, or at the very least you'll have able assistants for your online research. If you manage to get them hooked, you could ask them to make a presentation or video or write an essay on what they found.

4. Shoehorn writing in wherever you can - With the best will in the world you will not manage as much writing as your child would be doing in school. You may have an enthusiastic writer in which case it should be straightforward to give them writing tasks. If your child is a more **reluctant writer** you may need to **be more creative** and build on their interests as much as possible, e.g. retelling a story in comic form (writing speech bubbles), writing a letter or postcard to a friend, writing a character description of a favourite film character, writing instructions of how to build a model from Lego. I heard a lovely idea about getting children to write a daily journal which will later become an amazing historical source for people in the future researching Covid-19. You can also be more flexible than school about **other forms of recording** their ideas e.g. using speech to text on a I Pad, making a powerpoint, typing, drawing, mind maps. (Typing is a skill for life – BBC Dance Mat Typing is fun and free).

5. You are not bad at maths - It can be so easy to drop maths off the timetable if you don't feel confident in the subject, as many people don't. As a former maths teacher, I want to tell you **right now** that **you are good at maths**. If you don't think you are, you may have been taught badly at some point, and you might have some maths anxiety. Maths anxiety and avoidance can be transmitted to your child so, like Taylor Swift, you might want to shake it off.

Get your curiosity back. Ask your child to teach you the last thing they learned. Notice their methods and try to use them yourself. **If you make mistakes, that's good.** Maths is about getting it wrong and checking your working to see where it happened, then going back and making it right. **Slow down** with maths. If you find **one juicy maths problem** that comes up naturally during the day that you can solve together; that's great. Write it down, do some working out, check whether the answer seems right. **Talk about what you thought**, ask your child how they did each mental calculation – and I mean *everything* - and when you get to an answer, be sure you are both confident that it works.

6. Get outside – whatever the weather, if you are lucky enough to have access to the outdoors, use it. Spend a (big?) portion of your time outside, have a brew, exercise, explore, do some gardening. If the weather is fine, do some learning activities out there. If you live in a flat and are self-isolating, go to the window and cloud-spot. You will have a boost of **vitamin D** and your **wellbeing** will increase.

7. Plan social interaction - We know how important social interaction with other children is, and we don't know what the restrictions will be over the coming weeks. It will be worth planning for this each day. Helping your child to **have a chat** on the phone or by video messaging app may be the most social interaction we can hope for so I will be making this a priority. Your child might need teaching about conversation skills whilst **video messaging** (rather than, say, just pulling faces at themselves in the screen) so you could talk to them about turn taking and listening skills beforehand, and notice their good listening to them afterwards.

8. Play, play, play - We know that over time, children's access to play has reduced despite their right to play being enshrined in law and play being crucial to development. This is an opportunity to redress that balance. Don't worry, that doesn't mean eight hours by the side of an upturned Lego box followed by 2 hours of picking it out of your rug every day. Play comes in many different forms and whilst we might not manage them all, we can certainly think about offering a range of types of play. Essential elements of play include **fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity** (UNCRC, 2013, pp.5–6). **Join them** for some of it, if you are able to. Offer play opportunities that build on your interests as well so you can enjoy it and be silly too. Let them get on with it **independently** if they can.

9. Put on some tunes and read a book - We all respond to music and it can affect our mood. Put on some music and have a dance or sing together (again, if they'll let you without running away). Read together. If your child is a reluctant reader read to them for enjoyment. Read magazines that build on their interests.

10. Find your people –You might not be able to meet up but you can have a group (e.g. Whatsapp -other messaging services available) to share teaching ideas, plan some social interaction, vent, and support each other. Reach out and remember that mums, dads, carers and other relatives will all be homeschooling.

Further resources:

TES - <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources> lots of teaching resources sorted by age, lesson plans, worksheets and powerpoints, many of which are free to download: (you can also find visual timetable making resources here.)

BBC Dance Mat Typing - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zf2f9j6/articles/z3c6tfr>

Twinkl- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk> Twinkl have lots of teaching resources which usually incur a cost but they are offering a month of free access to parents in the event of school closures.