



Coping with your children during Covid

I am a single mother to 3 boys 20, 10 and 6. On the 23rd March the country went into lockdown, which happens to be my son's 20th birthday.

Impact on my 20-year-old child

Though he came back from university the week prior, we were not quite expecting a lockdown to happen on his actual birthday! That meant any plans to go out to have a birthday dinner would need to be halted.

He is in his first year of his Social Policy degree which fortunately isn't too taxing academically for him. However, adjusting to working mainly online away from his new social circle has been harder. He is resilient however, so this is an opportunity for him to knuckle down in readiness for his 2nd year of his degree and he knows this! He has been working again at his old job here in London, supporting the nation through the lockdown, making one pizza at a time!

Impact on my 10-year-old and 6-year-old

It took us all by surprise. In having to explain to my younger children that their school would be closing and how there would be a pause to my 10-year old's development training with Crystal Palace football club was a tough conversation to have, with some tears from him to follow.

Adjusting to school at home

My children really love school, so it broke my heart to make these announcements. I had no idea where I would start but reassured them that no matter what or for however long this lasts, we would make it fun!

“Take stock, stay calm, process this new dynamic”

I thought where should I start? I tuned into the radio and heard what I believed to be the most timely and wise words from a Head Teacher advising parents, who said, "Let the children take their two week Easter holiday first and then ease into your routine during the lockdown."

This was perfect! Take stock, stay calm, process this new dynamic and then create a plan! It has been a lot to process with the regular government daily briefings, but I was determined to extract as many positives from this experience as possible.

Then a few days later as I listened tentatively to the radio, another great contribution was made, this time it came from a Life Coach who said "The 4 things that will help you to get through this lockdown are:

- 1. Purpose**
- 2. Connection**
- 3. Routine**
- 4. Endorphins**

So I went to work on using this framework to adjust to the lockdown.

Purpose - making a difference to others; offer support to family, friends, neighbours self-isolating.

Connection - really use this time to connect with my children as well as family and friends over the phone.

Routine - Creating a semi-organic structure; this means the children learning through fun and various different ways, building on their strengths and tailored to their individual learning styles.

Endorphins - Where possible I'd bring my skipping rope, play some football with the boys, create skateboard vs. scooter races and then go for simple walks with them as part of our daily exercise. Create family band, teach them to harmonise their voices or create a large bubble extravaganza from our balcony.

“Look at them as children and as pupils too”

I felt it was important for me to reframe the situation somewhat for myself to look at my little ones not only as my children but also as my pupils too. The first thing, I would need to do then is to assess what they know and get to know their strength and weaknesses in these areas.

Nothing too strenuous. Mental maths, stretching their current reading levels, even set them little tasks like choosing their favourite show and writing notes on it, helping them to develop the skill of paying attention to detail but also to help me understand how much detail they pay attention to.

Later came cooking together (my 6 year-old has now recently decided he wants to be a chef after making his own special seasoning for his chips!), the process of weighing things, practical maths problems whilst out shopping, fixing their bikes, family reading, getting out the old board games, keeping a pet snail and building Meccano sets to encourage S.T.E.M development.

School Support

I know that the children in their final year of my children's primary school have been having extra support from our school to help them to adjust during lockdown, support with their school workload and their transition into secondary school.

We have had regular weekly calls with the school since the lockdown started. I let them know early on that I thought I would have taken on more of their allocated schoolwork that is regularly sent home via email but that actually their emotional, social and personal development was of greater priority during this time such that they can adjust with greater ease later on down the road with all the new changes coming into place. To my surprise I have been thanked on numerous occasions by their teachers for concentrating on these areas of their development.

Suggestions to parents

Break up the time by creating a 4-week term.

I have broken up my time by creating a 4-week term here at home for them, with 4 weeks of education, then 1 week off, then 4 weeks again and one week off and so on. We plan to do this through until September.

Get your children into geography; Get them learning and naming continents, countries and their capitals and other interesting things about the world in which we live.

Going back to school: do what is best for your family; Though my youngest child is eligible to go back to school now due to being in year 1. After taking our school's survey having conversations with teachers, I took the decision not to send him back, without my year 5 child going back too. Personally, I felt that the continuity of them both being together at home would provide much more emotional stability for them long term such that they could adjust into their school's new social distancing measures at the same time.

As lockdown eases.

Slowly the lockdown is easing but in all I have found the lockdown to be a very insightful experience for myself and my children. It has helped us all to communicate with greater depth our concerns, our challenges, and our aspirations both individually and as a family during this time.

Be gentle on yourself: To other single parents during the lockdown, I would say be gentle on yourself in getting everything done. Pace yourself! These are unprecedented times after all!

Trust your instincts: You know your children as you are the ones who put them to bed. Do not doubt yourself or your instincts. If you feel that you have lost touch with them. Get to know them. Speak to them about their concerns or worries.

What you do, often they will follow: You don't have to have all the answers and it's ok to say "I don't know", "I'll find out" or "We'll have to wait and see." Remember they are looking for your leadership. What you do they often will follow. Be courageous and humble enough to start from scratch with them if you need to. You will find that taking this time to reconnect to your children will be of great emotional benefit to them during lockdown and beyond.

