

A young woman with braids and a man are looking at a laptop together in a home setting. The woman is wearing a white t-shirt and dark overalls, and the man is wearing a dark t-shirt with a colorful pattern. They are both looking at the laptop screen with interest. The background shows a kitchen area with a window and some items on a shelf.

MANAGING WORK & HOME SCHOOLING

A GUIDE FOR COUNCIL STAFF

For the second time, many of us have found ourselves trying to do not just our ordinary job, but home schooling our children as well. Here are some ideas for managing this.

First of all, **be kind to yourself**. You can't do it all and your children's teachers will understand this. It won't be the end of the world if you let your children watch TV while you take a call or attend a Teams meeting. They will catch up.

Secondly – please remember you are a parent first and foremost – and that is the best you can be and the most important role you can have. Relax and remember you are already doing the best job possible.

Speak to your line manager. Your manager will be as supportive as possible. If you really can't get something done, let them know and ask for help. You certainly won't be the only one who is struggling and nobody will think badly of you or judging you. We are here to help each other and your manager can help you to manage and prioritise your workload, explore flexibilities and new ways of working, and be a listening ear.



Some quick hints and tips:

1. Talk to your line manager and colleagues – we all need to support each other in these challenging times.

2. Have a daily routine but don't worry if you don't keep to it!

3. Prepare lunch before you start in the morning - This could be a packed lunch that you normally prepare for school.

4. Put daily breaks into your calendar each week– ensuring you have at least two 15 mins breaks and a longer lunch/meal break. Write what you will do - will go for a walk, listen to music, watch TV, read a magazine etc.

5. If possible, have defined work and home study spaces.

6. Where you have 2 meetings on line back to back. Take a 10 min transition comfort break. Use the teams chat to let colleagues know you will do this.

7. If you are chairing a meeting, aim to finish 10-15 minutes early to allow participants a comfort break or check in with their children.

8. Have a resource pack available for your children to occupy them for periods you can't give them your full attention – colouring books and pens, reading books, games, healthy snacks and drinks.

9. Give your children mini projects - children learn through real world activities.

10. Have realistic expectations – children rarely spend a whole day in school doing academic learning, so don't expect them to at home.

11. Ask for help and accept help.

12. Take time for yourself and remind yourself you are doing brilliantly!

On a practical note:

Take time to **make a plan**. This can include things like drawing up a timetable for who gets to use the laptop at which time, or whose turn it is to read to you. If your children's schools aren't sending much work home, look for other resources you can use – there is a list at the end of this document. Ask your children what subjects they think they need most help with and focus on these if time is tight.

Give your children fair warning if you are going to need to get on with some work – “At three o'clock I've got a meeting, so are you ready to get on with your maths by yourself? You need to decide now if there's anything you are going to need, because I won't be able to get it for you until half past.”

If you can, plan your own timetable around theirs so you are all concentrating at the same time.

Being bored is not always a bad thing. Children need to learn how to amuse themselves for short periods of time and they also need to be able to respect the needs of other people. If you have to leave them to their own devices for a while, don't feel guilty. Give them small tasks to keep them occupied. Things like sorting laundry, putting dishes away or writing a shopping list can help children feel grown up as well as helping you. Keeping a diary, drawing a picture or counting how many red cars go past in fifteen minutes are all the kind of things children can do to amuse themselves.

Younger children might enjoy an activity box that is kept for these times, you might be able to add to it over time, keeping it interesting and absorbing.



Many will be missing their friends, so helping them write a letter or make a card to send can be both a good activity as well as helping them to stay in touch. Older children could plan the family's weekly budget.

Break problems down into small steps that the child can manage. Some things, like lockdowns, can't be controlled but there are always little actions that can be taken to improve the situation and reduce conflict. For example, you could help your child to practice asking for help rather than getting cross when they are struggling with their maths.

Calmly discuss consequences with your children, before things get heated and everyone gets upset. Try saying something like: "What happens next is up to you. You can carry on disturbing me, which means you won't get to play Fortnite later and we'll all be fed up. Or you can sit quietly with a book for the next twenty minutes, and then we can have a drink and you get to play your game, so we all have a nice evening. It's your choice. What do you think you'd like to do?"

Regular breaks are good for you all. Reminding children that they've only got to concentrate for another five minutes before they can play is a good way to help them build self-discipline and it can also make the day feel more manageable. It's also important to take regular breaks from the screen, when you can stand up, stretch and rest your eyes.

If you can, **have a defined workspace** that you can leave behind at the end of your working day. If you have to do everything in one place, try covering work with a tablecloth or pack it away so it definitely feels like you've finished for the day when you stop work.

Use positive language as much as possible. This builds a sense of confidence and reduces anxiety, whilst making it clear to your child what you want them to do. For example, instead of "your room is always a mess" try saying "it's not like you to be untidy, you're normally a very neat person." You're still making it clear the room needs to be tidied, but in such a way that the child doesn't end up feeling defensive or upset.

Finally, **remember that you're not a superhero**. You will be baffled by long division, you will snap at your partner for breathing too loudly, and you will forget to answer that email. Forgive yourself. These are extraordinary times and we're only human. Tomorrow is another day when we can all try again.

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Suggested resources:

The BBC is running a wide range of educational programmes for all ages and covering all subjects:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zvryp4j>

Oxford Owl offers a free library of e-books, as well as support in teaching phonics and wider reading skills:

<https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk>

CEOP offers support for children, parents and carers and teachers on staying safe online. The site also includes a reporting function for use when a child has received inappropriate contact online:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>

MindEd and Young Minds offer advice on supporting children's emotional health:

<https://www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

Mencap offers support for parents of children and young people with learning disabilities, including an online forum for families:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/children-and-young-people/support-parents-and-carers-children-and-young-people>

A Google search for home school lockdown activities produces many results, but some good ones we found include: <https://www.youtube.com/user/watchfreeschool/playlists> (be aware that if “autoplay” is on, there may be a risk of your child seeing inappropriate content without warning so it's worth turning it off for younger children)

<https://www.tts-group.co.uk/home+learning+activities.html> – **free downloadable workbooks for early years and KS1 and 2**

Draw with Rob is a YouTube channel of free online art lessons, and for something a bit different, but that helps children develop a really useful skill, Charlie Raine offers bite size lessons in British Sign Language – ideal for occupying children with meaningful content that doesn't feel like school work:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBpgrJijMpk_pyp9uTbxLdg

<https://www.youtube.com/c/BSLCharlie/videos>