

Routine and Structure

How to support your child to have a good routine in lock down FAQs

The changes in education provision, community resources and new rules and regulations mean our usual routine and structure has been taken away. This can cause distress and confusion for most of us and can impact on our ability to access education, sleep well and feel good. Below are frequently asked questions about how you can find routine and structure amongst the chaos. They have been divided into sections about work, rest and leisure to make it easier to navigate but remember often each area will impact on each other.

Work/Leisure

The structure of physically attending school and work gives us a change of both physical and social scenery and you can separate work and leisure more easily. Lockdown and restrictions have changed that, and many young people are learning at home, in addition the restrictions have often meant that our leisure activities and support groups are no longer running or have moved online.

Getting a balance of work, rest and leisure is an important part of keeping us healthy and productive.

You and your child are going to learn many new skills during this pandemic, some of these skills will be life skills for the future.

My child is struggling to concentrate on schoolwork, how can I help them?

Concentrating on schoolwork in a different environment is really difficult, you don't have all the normal social and physical cues which support you to focus and may be distracted by other activities.

Firstly, have a think about why your child is struggling to concentrate.

Is your child anxious and worried about the pandemic?

Many children and adults are worried about the pandemic and finding it difficult to cope. Please access additional resources for support with relaxation and coping with stress for you and your child.

Is your child struggling with the content of the work, is it too hard or too easy or do you need help to explain something?

Chat to the experts, your child's teachers, they are skilled in helping to inspire, encourage and facilitate learning.

Is your child finding it difficult to focus on schoolwork at home?

There are so many things which can make it hard to focus at home see ideas below

Don't forget to use the information in the sensory circuits FAQ and support your child to be ready and able to concentrate with their brain and body in their best state.

Some children benefit from some fresh air and exercise before starting learning. Many children who usually walk to school are more alert and engaged in their school day. When your learning is at home it may be helpful to recreate that and go for a morning walk 'as if you're walking to school'.

Can you negotiate with your child? Or is it best to give limited choices?

Some children respond differently to demands placed on them by someone outside of the family.

Some children benefit from having a very structured planned out day where there is no negotiating. This may be easier to create when you are working from a set timetable of live lessons from the school but when the lessons can be reviewed at a time which suits you it can be harder to structure your day.

You know your child best work with them and try to agree when schoolwork and leisure/rest is going to happen during the day.

Perhaps sign an agreement, make sure it's realistic, always better to have achieved more than you set out to than struggling to complete seemingly never-ending lists.

Times of the day when you expect schoolwork to be done

- Where possible try to stick to times similar to the school day this will make it easier for your child to re-establish school routines when schools open again
- Avoid schoolwork being close to bedtime to support good bedtime routines.
- Does your child work best in the morning or straight after lunch, perhaps try to gear activities they find easier or more fun during the period of the day that they find concentrating harder?

You may choose to have rest time in between activities or if there are activities or learning that they enjoy these could form part of reward time.

Consider whether your child benefits from a reward chart - make sure rewards are tangible and timely, collect stars/tokens/stickers for a bigger reward at the end of the week. Perhaps the reward can be to choose the film to watch as a family or choose where to go for a walk at the weekend. Be consistent and stick to it, if your child hasn't earned the reward, they shouldn't have it, inconsistency creates confusion and mistrust in the long run.

Think about social and physical environment - see below for ideas

Think about brain breaks/sensory movement breaks in between activities to help re-establish focus - see below for ideas.



Think about your terminology. Would it be helpful during school hours to use some of the terms used at school? Perhaps once a learning task is completed could you have choice time, use the term lunch break and break time.

Food/nutrition

We know from the campaigns from Marcus Rashford recently that children who are not sufficiently nourished find it harder to concentrate on schoolwork. Please make sure you access the support that may be available to you to ensure your child has access to food and nutrition, this improves their chances of being able to concentrate.

A good breakfast to start the day with slow releasing energy keeps you fuller for longer, try to minimise high sugar and processed foods as these tend to provide high peaks of energy followed by a slump in energy

Marks and Spencer have made some suggestions of meal ideas which may be helpful although there are lots of other ideas on the internet.

Kids' breakfast & lunch planner

Plan five days of tasty, balanced breakfasts and lunches for two children for less than £20 – with leftovers – all developed by M&S Food senior nutritionist Laura Street.



MONDAY

BREAKFAST: DIPPY EGG AND SOLDIERS

Boil 2 eggs for 6 minutes and serve with toasted Best of Both bread, topped with your kids' favourite spread and cut into soldiers.

LUNCH: EASY, CHEESY PASTA

Cook a couple of large handfuls of pasta and stir in half a jar of tomato and basil sauce. Serve with Cheddar cheese grated on top.

SNACK: BANANA 'ICE CREAM'

Freeze two bananas, then blitz until creamy for a healthy banana 'ice cream'.

TUESDAY

BREAKFAST: BANANA TOAST

Toast two slices of bread and top each with one sliced banana and your little ones' favourite spread from the fridge.

LUNCH: TORTILLA PIZZAS AND SALAD

Spread the remaining pasta sauce over two wraps, top with a sliced pepper and cheese slices. Grill until melted. Serve with a salad of three grated carrots and two sliced tomatoes.

WEDNESDAY

BREAKFAST: THREE BEARS PEAR PORRIDGE

Cover 250g porridge oats with milk and a splash of water, then simmer until creamy. Top with two chopped pears. Mix any leftover porridge with 50g raisins and spoon into cupcake cases, then bake at 190°C fan for 30-40 mins. Save for tomorrow's breakfast.

LUNCH: INDOOR PICNIC

Cook two handfuls of pasta and toss with a tin of tuna and two quartered tomatoes. Serve with crunchy chopped carrots and peppers, and a pot of fromage frais and a banana each. Don't forget to invite the teddy bears!

THURSDAY

BREAKFAST: PORRIDGE MUFFINS

Enjoy the porridge muffins you made yesterday with some sliced pear.

LUNCH: SPEEDY CHEESE AND TOMATO TOASTS

Arrange sliced Cheddar and tomatoes on top of two slices of bread (like all M&S bread, it contains vitamin D). Grill until bubbling and enjoy with a pot of fromage frais each.

FRIDAY

BREAKFAST: SUPERHERO OMELETTES

Slice 250g mushrooms and fry in 1tsp oil and 1tsp butter until golden. Add 4 beaten eggs and cook to your liking.

LUNCH: FISH FINGER SANDWICHES

Cook the fish fingers according to the pack instructions and serve in four slices of bread. Serve with your kids' favourite condiments from the fridge, if you like. Enjoy with a pot of fromage frais and a sliced pear each.

SHOPPING LIST

- 500g penne pasta
- 1 jar tomato & basil pasta sauce
- 8 white tortilla wraps
- 1 loaf (750g) Best of Both medium sliced bread
- 1 tin tuna
- 2 peppers
- 250g mature Cheddar slices
- 4 bananas
- 6 pack fromage frais
- 9 chunky breaded cod fish fingers
- 500g carrots
- 6 round tomatoes
- 6 free-range mixed size eggs
- 500g traditional porridge oats
- 6 ripen at home conference pears
- 1 pint M&S Select Farms milk
- 500g raisins
- 300g white mushrooms

5 lunches + 5 breakfasts for 2 for £20

Get your H₂O!
 Staying hydrated is super important, so don't forget to serve a glass of water with each meal.

Please note – if you're feeding smaller children, reduce the portion sizes.



How can I create the best working environment for my child to concentrate?

Environmental cues can often support or hinder our learning. The environment includes our physical space, our seating position, noise, social environment, temperature.

When children go to school (pre pandemic) different rooms in the school were used for different activities, classrooms for work, playground for leisure fun and dining hall for lunch, we rarely have that luxury of space at home use some of the ideas below to think about how you can create the best learning environment for your child.

Physical space

- Wherever possible encourage your child to learn in an environment that is not their bedroom, if it isn't possible then perhaps consider using a school bag or box and bringing school into the bedroom at the start of the 'school day' and then removing it at the end of the day.
- Does your child work best in natural light or would you prefer all the curtains shut and external stimulus reduced? You may know this already or it may be a bit of trial and error.
- If your child is working at the dinner table consider them sitting in a different seat for lesson time rather than in the seat they usually sit in, it will make the environment look different and changes the emphasis of the seat from food/social interaction to work and learning.
- If your child is learning in their bedroom, try to discourage them to sit on their beds if there is no option then remove pillows and duvets so that the bed looks and feels different to create a separation between work and sleep environments.
- Make sure you get fresh air and exercise every day, break up work tasks with movement and a change of scene.

Seating position.

- Your eyes should be level with the top of your computer monitor. This is easier with desktop PCs, this can be a struggle with laptops, where the keyboard and screen are fixed close together. You could try putting the laptop on some books or other (safe) object that will increase the height.
- Your shoulders should be relaxed and low, not high and hunched up. You should feel like you're not lifting your shoulders.
- Your lower arms should be parallel to the floor. They should rest on a support, rather than being held up.
- You shouldn't be reaching too far for your keyboard and/or mouse. You should be able to control them easily with arms bent at the elbow.
- Your feet should be flat on the floor. Just putting your toes on the floor isn't enough!
- Your upper back should be straight. Your lower back has a natural curve that should be supported by your chair.
- You shouldn't slouch in your chair. Your hips should be as close to the back of the chair as possible.
- Your upper legs should be at a 90° angle from your body. If you're short, this may mean that you need a footrest. If you're particularly tall, you'll need a higher chair (and may also require a higher desk).
- You should be sitting up straight and your screen should be a full arm's length away from you.

- You shouldn't be leaning to one side. It can be tempting to rest on one arm, but this causes your spine to curve.

However...

Not all of us were built the same and we may find that there are different ways we need to sit to help us to focus, it is ok to move about and change positions when we are working. Some children find they need to sit, stand or lay down during the day that's ok too. Some children find move and sit cushions or sitting on gym balls is the best way to help focus and feel in the best state to learn. Your occupational therapist may be able to help give you some ideas of the best seating position for your child.

Tips for sitting comfortably

- Build in breaks from sitting down regularly in your day.
- Raise the back of your laptop slightly to give a slight slope to the keyboard as this will tilt the angle of the keys and your wrist is in a more dynamic position which can help your hand move across the keyboard more comfortably.
- Temperature - is the room temperature comfortable

Clothes - most school children wear a uniform for school obviously there is no uniform for the child at home in lockdown, however some parents have encouraged their children to wear their uniform during school hours, to create a separation between home and school and mark out different times of the day. Either way make sure clothes are comfortable and easy to move around in, not too tight and perhaps layered to adjust to the temperature during the day.

Sensory environment

Noise

- Noise in the house can disrupt our concentration whether that is a ring at the door or the noise of a sibling. Is it possible to change the ring of a doorbell, or pop a note on your door and say your home schooling? Can your parcels be left elsewhere? Such as in an outbuilding or with a neighbour? Always check that it is safe to do so, and you follow any restrictions/guidelines that are in place.
- Does your child benefit from wearing noise cancelling headphones, or perhaps white noise or relaxing music (try to pick music without words)?
- White noise includes all audible frequencies. Energy is equally distributed across these frequencies. The equal distribution creates a steady humming sound. White noise examples include whirring fan; radio or television static; hissing radiator; humming air conditioner. Since white noise contains all frequencies at equal intensity, it can mask loud sounds that stimulate your brain.

Visual

- Turn off additional screens so they are not a distraction,

- Close the door to the room your child is working in
- If there are other children in the house, try to encourage them to be in a different room for periods of the day (easier said than done!)
- Shut curtains and blinds to reduce the simulation outside of the house but ensure the lighting in the room is sufficient and works for your child.
- Go outside and/or to a different room when having a break from schoolwork.

Temperature, where possible, try to stick to an ambient temperature to support your child to work this is often between 18-20 degrees Celsius, if the temperature is too cold it makes it difficult to concentrate as we use all our energy to keep warm. If it is too hot, we can find ourselves feeling sleepy and tired.

My child doesn't like seeing themselves on screens and finds it hard to join in social or school activities online. How can I give them confidence?

Lots of children and adults struggle to be seen on screen in zoom, facetime and Google meets. In most of these systems there are ways in which you can turn off your camera or microphone to make it less uncomfortable for your child.

In live lessons the teacher often wants to see your child on screen, as this can help them to participate fully in the lesson and for them to be able notice, if your child is having that 'light bulb' moment to celebrate or is finding something a bit harder. It means that your teacher can modify the teaching to reflect the needs of the students in the class. Therefore, whilst it is possible to turn off the camera it isn't always the best thing for them.

Virtual meetings and screens are here to stay, many businesses are seeing the benefits of working remotely and communicating using this means therefore building up your child's confidence in using technology in this way will create opportunities for them in the future.

Ideas for how to build confidence on screens.

- Acknowledge it is difficult they are not alone.
- Try having the camera on but not looking directly at your child but perhaps their work or just the table. Gently moving the camera slowly perhaps starting with the camera looking at your child's hands or schoolbook and moving slowly up the body.
- Play games with family or doing fun activities with familiar people can help get people used to being on screen. Some applications that are available have built in functions for play for example house party application has games such as Pictionary and uno (please make sure you stay safe online and only communicate with people who you know)
- Have an activity to do online, try draw-with-rob (<http://www.robbiddulph.com/draw-with-rob>) if everyone on the call is drawing together you start to forget that people can see you.
- Build up short periods of time on video at time so perhaps for the beginning of the lesson when everyone says hello or at the end of a lesson.

How much screen time should my child have?

Screen time is often a well debated topic between child and parent and in our current climate the amount of screen time has increased for many families. As schoolwork, leisure and social activities move online and in front of a screen we seem to be spending more and more time using technology.

Technology has in many ways been a saviour to Covid-19 restrictions, it allows social contact, play and learning to all continue to take place within the safety of our homes.

The stress/anxiety and worry currently means we are resorting to the escapism of screens more and more and allowing children to have access to screens to provide us as adults some respite. These are important and to help us all to cope we need to be kind to ourselves.

Current NHS advice is that for 'children aged 6 years and older, consistent limits should be placed on the time spent using media, and on the types of media, and to make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviours essential to health.

Spend designated media-free time together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.' Ideas for media free activities are included in some of the questions below.

Screen time could be divided into work and leisure activities

Monday to Friday school activities often require increased amounts of screen time as google meets some children have online lessons for much of the school day.

Separate social activities online from gaming, or watching television try to put realistic and manageable restrictions on each area separately.

Reduce access to screens for the hour before bedtime as the blue light emitted can have a negative effect on sleep patterns.

My child is enjoying being at home for his/her learning. I am worried about how to get them back into school when schools reopen.

For some children learning from home has been something that they have enjoyed, they may have found the added restrictions around social interaction and the increased amount of control they have in their own environment means they feel happier and more able to engage in learning.

We need to acknowledge that for some children there are positives to being at home and reduced social contact.

We also don't have any concrete answers that we can give children about how long the schools may be online or if schools return that there may be occasions when children have to manage short periods of home learning again in response to risk.

Talk to your school and think about the transition plan for your child for the return. There may be a school wide plan that will suit your child, or you may need to think about tweaking this to meet their individual needs.

A few tips

- Try to maintain similar hours to a school day.
- Try to support your child to continue to engage in education and learning activities set by their teachers.
- Maintain good communication with your school.
- Talk about school and returning in gentle and non-challenging ways.

I'm trying to work from home, and I feel like I'm letting my child down, how can I best support them?

Remember you're not alone, what is happening now is challenging and not what any of us have chosen to do.

Taken from BBC bitesize

1. Be realistic and kind to yourself
2. Notice what's on your mind
3. Connect with other parents
4. Create routine and agree your own
5. Be honest and say sorry when you can

I didn't find the answer I needed here. What can I do now?

Don't panic, there's always people to help. In the first instance your child's teacher may be able to offer you some help or ideas. They may also suggest that you speak with one of the occupational therapists who can give specific advice for your child to support them at this time. Remember there's never a stupid question if in doubt ask.

Ideas for Brain breaks and sensory movement breaks

- Learn a musical instrument
- Take up a new hobby, origami, card making, crochet. Learn to bake
- Access activities like go noodle or cosmic kids' yoga
- Learn how to do keepy uppies with a football or balloon
- Play a card game
- Complete a HIIT workout
- How long can you plank for?
- Set a press up or burpee challenge
- Go for a walk around the block
- Watch the birds in the garden, make a bird feeder and record what birds are visiting
- Use activities from sensory circuits to refocus your mind and body
- Build something from Lego or junk modeling
- Play with sand, rice, slime



- Meditate or practice mindfulness