

# A Guide for Parents on supporting children while schools are closed

(Adapted from document created by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS))

The Government has made a decision to close all schools in Ireland in order to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 virus and keep as many people as possible safe and well. We have not been in this situation before, so this is new to us all, but if we follow the right advice we will get through this.

During this time, children and young people need your support to create new routines that will keep them busy and give them a sense of control of their lives. This will become more important as time goes on. Routines and schedules are key to helping them through this unprecedented phase in their lives. By having a structured and predictable day, they will feel more secure and reassured.

Parents and children can work together to help to get through this time by creating a Plan for the Day every evening for the day ahead. The **Plan for the Day** <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/plan-your-day.pdf> should include where possible:

- A. **Normal Daily Routines:** It's important to encourage your child to eat healthily, to drink lots of water and to take care of their personal hygiene. Taking exercise, showering, getting dressed and getting a good night's sleep should be included in their daily routine. Encourage your child to go to bed and get up at the usual time during the week. Help your child have a good night's sleep by asking them to leave their devices (phone/laptop/tablet) outside of their bedroom each night.
- B. **Physical activity & housework:** Physical activity is important for children's health and wellbeing. Timetable physical exercise into each day. Your child may already have an exercise routine or preferred physical activity. If possible, try some physical activity outdoors and get some sunshine and fresh air staying within a 2km radius of your home and with your family only. Helping with the extra housework (empty and load the dishwasher/vacuum/help with the shopping/cooking/washing/mow the lawn/wash & vacuum the car).
- C. **Social activity:** Many children are finding it hard not meeting their friends. Encourage them to use technology to stay in touch with friends. You can encourage other types of social contact by supporting them to: telephone relatives, spend time with the family watching TV together, playing board games/making a jigsaw or helping a younger brother or sister with their schoolwork.
- D. **Enjoyable/creative activities,** should also be included in the Plan for the Day. Use the time to try something new or learn a new hobby. Technology/ YouTube2 can be helpful when learning something new. Encourage your child to try a crossword, draw, paint, write or listen to music. Encourage your child to capture each day by documenting it through drawing, writing, recording or photography. Write/email a letter to a friend, relative or elderly neighbour. Watch a favourite TV programme. Prepare a meal. Bake a cake. Read a book.
- E. **Schoolwork:** Primary school children are usually engaged in 'active learning' when they are in school, which means that they move and change tasks frequently throughout the day. Break up the schoolwork routine with physical activities and creative/enjoyable activities. Look out for emails or messages from your child's school/teachers. They may be able to provide some helpful support during this time. RTÉ Home School Hub is a daily scheduled virtual classroom for primary school children on RTÉ 2 from 11am to 12 noon. It can also be viewed anytime on the RTE Player with online resources available here. Be flexible and sensible.

*What's important is that your child makes a good effort each day to complete some schoolwork.*

## ***10 Useful Tips for Parents to reduce stress levels for all***

1. Younger children may respond well to setting up routines and taking your advice and guidance while older children may resist having a **Plan for the Day**. <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/plan-your-day.pdf>.

For **Blank Plan for the Day**, see <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/blank-plan-for-the-day.pdf>

**Remind them that this is still the school term and schoolwork is continuing.** Talk to them about the importance of routine for their health and wellbeing at this time, as well as the importance of keeping up with the curriculum, in preparation for their return to school.

2. Remind yourself that **it is normal that children might find it difficult to do schoolwork at home.** Having to work independently without the stimulus and interaction of teachers and classmates is new for your children and may be challenging. While it may be important to support your child to engage with learning at home by using technology, it's not and cannot be exactly the same for your child as learning in school. Your child is likely to be less focused and attentive than they would be in school. If this is the case, consider helping them to start small and increase their study/schoolwork time gradually. Encourage them to take short breaks between study blocks.

3. **It may be stressful for parents if they believe that they have to be a 'substitute teacher'.**

Remember, you are not a teacher and there is no expectation that you should be doing extensive hours of tutoring or completing schoolwork with your child every day. Be realistic and sensible about your child's needs and your own during this time. Be flexible and open to adjusting to both your needs and your child's needs – do what you can!

4. **Encourage older children in the house to help their young siblings** (if you think this could work), and build this in to their Plan for the Day.

5. Remember that learning isn't just about sitting with a pen and paper at a desk. **Children can learn through baking, gardening or other activities of interest to you or your family.** For example, baking can involve reading the recipe, following written instructions, learning about weight and measurement and the development of life skills, such as how to clean up after yourself, how to share and how to take turns.

6. **Every child is different** and you may find that your individual children respond to this situation in different ways. That's okay. If needed, try to support them individually to adjust their schedules depending on their age, additional needs, motivation etc.

7. No matter what age, **allow your children choices in relation to their Plan for the Day.** Choosing the activities and the order in which they engage with those activities will be motivating and empowering for your child.

8. **If the Plan for the Day has not worked**, remember this is a time of learning and adjusting so it may take time to get it right. At the end of each day, your child may want to discuss with you what worked well about the plan and what was challenging. Help them to think about how it could be improved for the next day.

9. For many children and young people it may be difficult to stay motivated and focused when working alone at home. This is normal. The Plan for the Day will help. Encourage them to take regular breaks and **praise and reward them for working hard and trying their best**. You may need to consider building in a reward or incentive system in order to help them experience success learning at home. Rewards don't have to cost money and can be daily or weekly depending on the age of the child. Examples include choosing a game for the family to play, having their favourite meal for dinner, choosing a family movie or extra phone or PlayStation time etc.

10. This may be a challenging time for families. **Be patient and kind with yourself**. If you can, take breaks during your day, get plenty of sleep, connect with friends and family using social media, exercise and eat well. Remember that the most important thing that you can do is love and care for your child and reassure them that Covid-19 will pass. The following two links are relaxation techniques (text and podcast), which may be helpful for adults and children in dealing with stress. Give them a go!

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/new-relaxation-techniques.pdf>

<https://soundcloud.com/user-719669409/relaxation-techniques-30-03-2020>

## Check out these websites:

- HSE
- Department of Education and Skills
- [https://twitter.com/@Education\\_Ire](https://twitter.com/@Education_Ire)
- Department of Health
- World Health Organisation (WHO)
- National Parents Council Primary & Early Years
- Little Things Campaign
- RTE School Hub
- Healthy Ireland