

Arlitt Mental Health Collaborative: Recommendations for Our Extended Break

Now that we are on an extended break from school, many of you may have questions about what you can do in the home to keep your children learning at this time. Some of this you might be doing already (e.g., schedules), but hopefully there are also some unique and easily accessible resources here that you have not yet considered.

Schedules

Schedules and routines give children a sense of what to expect throughout the day, which can be comforting both to parents and children. With normal schedules disrupted, children may not know what to expect every day. We can help them know what to expect with a daily schedule. This does not have to be down to the minute but keeping a general schedule can help children make sense of change and know what to do. You can physically post the schedule (e.g., on the wall), and remind them of the schedule throughout the day (e.g., “We’re going to read, then we will play in the yard, and then we will have lunch.”). You can share the schedule with other childcare providers to support consistency.

Schedule Block Ideas

- Wake up
- Breakfast
- Morning Routine (Make bed, brush teeth, get dressed)
- Reading Time
- Unstructured Play
- Family Game Time
- Outdoor Play
- Lunch
- Nap
- Art
- Movie Night
- Dinner
- Bedtime Routines
- Bedtime Story
- Puzzle Time
- Chores
- Pet Time
- Cooking Time
- Exercise

Unstructured Play

Young children learn best through exploratory play including cognitive skills, physical skills, vocabulary, social skills, and literacy skills (Bongiorno, n.d.). At Arlitt, children explore their environment and learn through play. You can provide a similar experience in your own home! During play times on the schedule, provide a space in which children can play with open-ended materials (e.g., blocks, Legos, magnetiles, drawing materials, playset figurines, dress-up clothes, playdough). You can narrow choices to three to five items to give your child choice but with limits. Your child can interact on their own and with siblings, and you can be a participant as well (e.g., asking questions and narrating the play).

Structured Play

Structured play time is the opposite of unstructured time. Close-ended activities are provided such as catch, hide-and-seek, board games, puzzles, crafts, scavenger hunts, obstacle courses, or fort building. These structured activities can build your child's skills (motor skills, problem-solving, taking turns, sharing, counting). This can also involve the whole family including any siblings. Like unstructured play times, you can build on what your child is doing with language (e.g., “I see you put the small, orange pillow on top of the two large, grey cushions.”).

Reading

Sharing a storybook with your child can introduce them to new vocabulary words, expand on interests, or discuss a social skill. One way to engage your child in reading is a technique called dialogic reading (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), which creates a dialog between you, your child, and the book. It involves your child with books they are listening to and does not need to be used every time. It involves the following sequence:

- Prompt: Ask your child something from CROWD (below).
 - Why did Rainbow Fish give away his scales?
- Evaluate: Provide feedback based on your child's response
 - That's right! He said he wanted to make them happy.
- Expand: Add information based on your child's response.
 - He wanted to make them happy by sharing.
- Repeat: Have your child repeat your expansion.
 - How did he make them happy? By sharing!

Think about what questions they might be able to answer. This can be especially important as you read to different age siblings at the same time. You might ask younger children simpler questions, and older children more complex questions. Here are types of questions that are great to ask, which can be varied to support their comprehension:

CROWD

- Completion Prompts: Rainbow Fish gave away his...?
- Recall: Who taught Rainbow Fish to share?
- Open-ended: Tell me about what you see on the page.
- Wh- questions: Why did Rainbow Fish not want to share?
- Distancing (thinking about connecting the book to real life): What have you shared with your friends at school?

Chores

Preschool age children can help around the house with various chores. Chores can help them develop life skills that are useful throughout life, and if made to be fun they often enjoy doing them! Children may not be able to perform chores perfectly but providing encouragement for effort gives them a sense of achievement and increases their likelihood of doing the chore in the future.

Possible Chores

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|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| ● Making bed | ● Shelving books | ○ Adding ingredients |
| ● Sorting laundry | ● Cleaning spills | ○ Getting ingredients |
| ● Feeding pets | ● Sorting safe silverware | ○ Getting utensils |
| ● Setting table | ● Assisting with Cooking | |
| ● Cleaning up toys | | |
| ● Dusting | | |
| ● Water plants | | |

Media

We are obviously in an unprecedented time with social distancing, and the importance of technology in remaining connected to others and also in occupying our children. The knowledge base is mixed concerning the benefits or harms of media consumption, however, here are some recommendations with the recognition that this will look different for each family at this time. Video chats with family members can be a great way for children to interact with family members, cameras on phones and tablets could be a unique way for your child to explore their environment, and e-book readers can provide children with an interactive story. Other types of media that are more passive (ex. movies, YouTube™ videos, and some games) may not offer the same benefits (NAEYC, 2012). However, these passive forms of media can become more engaging with the help of parents that ask important questions about what is happening in the video or in the game (You can use the same CROWD questions described in the reading section.). All technologies should be used in conjunction with adult supervision to monitor what children are doing, and we have included some tools below to assist you.

Here are some links on *how to control media*:

- Setting screen time on Apple devices: <https://www.imore.com/how-set-screen-time-your-child>

- Setting screen time on Google devices (Android, Samsung, Google) <https://support.google.com/families/answer/7103340?hl=en>
- How to block specific sites using an extension <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/block-websites-on-chrome>
- Creating content based blocks on Apple devices (restricting searches, blocking purchases, blocking websites not rated for children) <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201304>
- Creating content based blocks on Google devices <https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738?hl=en>

Self-Care

The present time is stressful for parents, caregivers, and families. Self-care practices can help you manage this stress. This can seem difficult as there are less resources for childcare to alleviate stress, however, there are practices you can do at home.

- Schedule time to be alone or talk with friends and family via video even for a few minutes at a time. Children can be allowed time to play on their own in a safe environment. You might also arrange for a family member or friend outside of the household to provide a virtual lesson or activity, while you have a moment to yourself.
- Set a timer to help them understand that you will be back to play after a time.
- Exercise for as little as 20 minutes can provide a stress release that you can involve your children in. Yoga, walking/running, meditating, and pre-programmed routines, etc. can all be sources of exercise that can be done at home. Many can be done in conjunction with your kids – they love to do yoga at Arlitt.

Self-Care Resources

- Free Meditation App: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.getsomeheadspace.android>
- Yoga YouTube channels: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SarahBethShow> & <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCX32D3gKXENrhOXdZjWWtMA>
- Yoga with Kids: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Talking with Your Kids About the Pandemic

Finally, we wanted to link to this resource from the National Association of School Psychologists that provides a number of helpful tips in talking to your child about Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

- [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

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