

The best chores for kids teach them helping out is part of being a family

There are so many benefits to giving kids chores: They learn responsibility, pick up new skills (like how to load a dishwasher properly), and — bonus! — take some housework off their parents' plates. The hard part is figuring out how to get children to just buckle down and do them.

Damon Korb, M.D., a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics and author of *Raising an Organized Child*, says you should focus less on the tasks themselves and more on what they can teach our children. In fact, he says you shouldn't even call them chores. "It sounds so onerous," he says. "Helping out around the house doesn't need to be a chore. I like to take the matter-of-fact approach: 'Everybody at our house helps each other — that's just what we do.'"

Chores also help kids practice the skills Dr. Korb says are essential to becoming organized and independent, like being consistent; figuring out the steps required to complete a task; giving everything a place; planning ahead; and problem-solving on the fly. "Another concept we attempt to teach our children is that there are things we need to do in life and things we want to do," he says.

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Summer learning through family activities

This summer is different. Usually a season of get-togethers, day- and sleepaway-camps, vacations and playdates with friends, this summer has parents searching for socially-distant and safe activities for their kids. Summer plans have been canceled, we've weathered months of quarantine and many are concerned their kids spend too much time in front of screens without exercising their brain. Pandemic fatigue has set in, and brainstorming ways to engage your child in learning to avoid "summer slide" can be exhausting.

The good news is that many of the family activities you already do at home teach valuable lessons. Cooking, doing laundry, gardening, grocery shopping, etc. with your kids not only teaches them the importance of helping out, but also boosts skills in math, science and reading comprehension. A little responsibility can help kids feel more in control and the feeling of accomplishment for a job well done can boost self-esteem and give purpose to their day.

So, give yourself a break — you've got this — and enjoy your summer!

SELF-CARE IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

When you're a parent, self-care often slips to the bottom of the list. But taking care of yourself isn't a luxury. It's essential. And during this difficult time, when children are home and stress is running high, it's more important than ever. Here are five tips from our clinicians that can help.

Make time for yourself

Right now, much of the personal time that was part of daily routines — commutes, time alone at home or at the store, social time with friends — is not available for folks with kids at home. Without it, we have to be intentional about creating space to recharge and decompress.

Prioritize healthy choices

The added stress and lack of structure we're all experiencing right now can make it easy to slip into habits that feel good in the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. "Make sure you're eating properly, try to get enough sleep (but not too much!), and create a routine that includes physical activity," recommends Jill Emanuele, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute.

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Self-care in the time of Coronavirus

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Be realistic

"Perfectionism and the coronavirus don't mix," says David Anderson, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. "It's time to be exceedingly realistic, both at work and as a parent." Avoid burnout by setting realistic expectations and giving yourself grace if you can't meet them. "Practice forgiveness and self-compassion," says Dr. Anderson.

Set boundaries

Anxiety is rampant right now. With so much worry and uncertainty floating around it can be easy to absorb other people's fears and concerns without even realizing it. If you have a friend or family member who's in the habit of sending worst-case-scenario news or is prone to sending anxiety-provoking text messages, practice a little emotional distancing. You can always reconnect when things are calmer.

Reconnect with things you enjoy

Think proactively of things you can do with this enforced time at home. Get back in touch with hobbies or activities you enjoy but rarely have time for, or make the choice to learn a new skill. If young children make solo activities unrealistic, seek out activities you can enjoy together, like baking bread, or making art.

Finally, remember, being kind to yourself will not only help you stay calm during this difficult time, it will help ensure that you have the bandwidth you need to take good care of your family.

When you prioritize your needs, you're filling the tank, emotionally and physically, and that means you'll be in a position to offer comfort and care to others when they need it most.

Summer is not completely canceled

This is not the summer we had hoped or planned for.

The calendar is littered with canceled vacations and summer camps, shuttered pools and playgrounds; spots in our calendars meant to be spent with friends and loved ones.

The summer weeks ahead are filled with ... nothing. (For some, nothing but work.) Adults, kids and adults feeling like kids, all bored. And that boredom, combined with the fear of getting sick or actually getting sick, could make for a cruel summer.

But wait. There really is still fun to be had. With a little bit of imagination, we can set ourselves free from that cage of coronavirus. We can play silly games. Connect with family and friends. And find ways to express gratitude for others, including our families and first responders.

Make your summer list

It's time to write down a list of activities you and your family want to do this summer. It's an exercise that will free you from the limits of your four walls. Number your list from one to however far you get and maybe even write it down on actual paper.

This is not a homework assignment. *It's about finding the joy that still exists inside you — kids and adults alike.* Get the first few ideas out. Now keep going, because that's when the ideas get ridiculous and really fun.

Want to play Quidditch with Harry Potter? Write it down.

Want to walk on the moon? Write it down.

Want to use all those wacky kitchen devices you've never removed from their boxes? Time to write those ideas down.

No, you can't actually fly to outer space right now, but you could stargaze at night.

We haven't figured out how to play real Quidditch but we do have Ravenclaw-like robes and the Harry Potter edition of Clue, so we can figure it out. We may try to make butterbeer too.

Learn what your kids are thinking

If you want to know what your kids are thinking these days, ask them to make their for own lists (and don't critique them). They'll tell you what they're thinking in those lists. And some of their ideas will be possible.

Nothing you or your loved ones write down means we won't still be scared or can't get sick or that we won't be in danger anymore.

But it can get you to figure out what's important to you, get your kids to think about what's still possible and fun, and connect you to the people you love (even by Zoom).

My 12-year-old's list included cooking shrimp and grits with Meme's recipe for dinner one night (Meme is one grandma's name), playing Monopoly, the first "Mary Poppins" movie and a living room sleepover. Oh, and I'm supposed to put down my phone while we do all these things, she requested.

I'm all in.

Here are some fun-in-my-opinion things to do this summer collected from colleagues, friends, family and me. I hope it salvages your summer and inspires your family as we navigate this new normal.



LET'S PLAY OUTSIDE

- Create a splash pad
- Grow herbs, lettuces and flowers
- Welcome the birds: Set up bird feeders, a nesting box or a birdbath
- Smash the virus: Make a coronavirus piñata, fill it with candy and whack the heck out of it.
- Chalk art museum
- Map the neighborhood

FOOD & DRINK

- Pantry challenge: Pick an ingredient out of the pantry or refrigerator and cook from it.
- Host a teatime
- Historic recipe hunt: Call a relative and ask them to walk you through a longtime family recipe.
- Eat someplace else: Pick another state or country with food you like, cook it and listen to their music during dinner.

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

- Use that equipment: It's time to get out that pasta or Popsicle maker or spiralizer and learn how to use it.
- Hire an intern: Have your child "intern" at your home office.
- Get down to science: Learn chemistry by making homemade butter and bread.
- Broaden your worldview: Read age-appropriate books about cultures different than yours.

DISCOVER MORE GREAT IDEAS AT

[HTTPS://WWW.CNN.COM/2020/05/22/HEALTH/100-THINGS-TO-DO-THIS-SUMMER-WELLNESS-TRND/INDEX.HTML.](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/22/health/100-things-to-do-this-summer-wellness-trnd/index.html)



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Of course, you want to practice different skills at different ages, and chores that a toddler can handle are very different from tasks that can be done by a teen or tween.

For toddlers, the emphasis should be on teaching sequences and order. "Toddlers and preschoolers can learn that every task has a beginning, middle, and end: We take out a toy, play with a toy, and put a toy away." Clearing a plate after dinner, putting laundry in the hamper, and cleaning up their play areas are good chores for flexing these new muscles.

When kids reach 6 and 7 years old, that's when you can start instilling the importance of helping out; feeding the family pet is a good way to concretely demonstrate this type of responsibility. They can also lend a hand loading and unloading the dishwasher, folding and putting away laundry, and setting the table.

"Children at this age are beginning to participate in community activities, so it's a great time for kids to learn how to manage their stuff," Dr. Korb says. "Help them to manage their soccer gear or dance bag. Teach them to keep their school materials and backpack in order."

"There is order inherent in meal preparation, so teaching children to cook at this age is also important," Dr. Korb adds. "Many 8-year-olds are capable of making their own breakfasts and packing their lunches for school." It's a good idea to keep what kids need for quick grab-and-go snack and meals within easy reach and see if they can make food prep a habit.

By the time they turn 10 or 11, they're ready for bigger tasks — and for the even bigger job of keeping track of everything they need to do themselves. "One way to help children with their independence is to use a chore chart," he says. "It serves as both a reminder and a timeline for different tasks. Children this age begin to despise their parents' 'nagging,' so using a chart, if effectively done, can reduce the parents' need to remind kids about chores — or at least limit the badgering to 'go and look at your chart.'"

With a chore chart in place, 11- and 12-year-olds can start getting firmer deadlines for their tasks. "Help your child to understand how certain chores are time-sensitive, like unloading the dishes before dinner so that the dishwasher is ready to be used again afterward, or taking out the trash on Tuesday evening before a Wednesday-morning pickup." This will help them with their own time-management as they inch closer to high school. Household tasks they can take on at this point include vacuuming, mowing the lawn, doing laundry, getting the mail, taking the trash bins in and out, and yard work like raking or weeding.

And then we get to the teenage years, which have the possibility of going off the rails completely. But it's not that teens don't want to lend a hand. "Teens can be very helpful when they're motivated," Dr. Korb says. "The problem is that their motivations are often very different than ours. This is a good age to teach your children about prioritization: the need-to-dos should happen before the want-to-dos." So, homework comes before screen time, not after.

And then, as they get older, you'll want to make sure their chore list incorporates everything they'll need when they eventually go off and live on their own, like cooking meals, doing laundry, ironing, sewing buttons, and cleaning.

Of course, no parent will get their kids to sail through all their chores throughout life without any pushback. "It's easy for parents to become frustrated when their children don't do chores, because we can really use their help," Dr. Korb says. "Developmentally, children and teens are ego-centric. They don't understand their parents' perspective. Instead of getting angry, think of a new way to teach the lesson."

LET'S LOOK AFTER OURSELVES, AND EACH OTHER

As days of isolation turn into weeks, many of us are feeling increasingly uprooted from our normal lives. In a world on lockdown, it isn't just our routines that are being disrupted, but our relationships too. Thankfully, distance doesn't have to mean disconnection.

These challenging times remind us that it's never enough to just look after ourselves. We must look after each other too.

Taking care of the mind has never been a personal pursuit. Each day, the steps we take and progress we make radiate outwards, like ripples on a pond. As our mental and emotional wellness improve, so do our relationships, and our communities. It's natural to experience feelings of disempowerment at this time. One way to reclaim your power is to remember that social distancing is a collective action to keep each other safe. You are doing something great simply by staying home.

In that spirit, Calm.com has handpicked some favorite meditations, sleep stories, movement exercises, journals, and music which can be accessed at <https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>. All of these resources are free to use, and to share. May they bring you, and those around you, peace.



DON'T FORGET ABOUT DEXTER COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Dexter's Community Education department provides recreational and enrichment programming for children through adults. This summer, Community Ed is offering both virtual and in-person activities such as youth tennis, field hockey and soccer camps, as well as art, cooking and science camps.

For more info, check out Community Ed's new website: dexterschools.ce.eleyo.com.

Dexter
Community Education

SUMMER RESOURCES

12 Summer Jobs Teens Can Do From Home or While Social Distancing

Parents.com

<https://www.parents.com/kids/teens/make-money/summer-jobs-for-teens-to-do-at-home-and-social-distancing/>

19 Fun Learning Activities for Kids

Parents.com

<https://www.parents.com/fun/games/educational/get-smart-fun-learning-activities/>

24 At-Home Learning Activities to Share with Parents of Young Children

Brookes Publishing Co.

<https://blog.brookespublishing.com/24-at-home-learning-activities-to-share-with-parents-of-young-children/>

How to Have Summer Fun Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

CNBC.com

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/20/how-to-have-summer-fun-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic.html>

How to Host Your Family's Own Personal Summer Camp

NYTimes.com

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/smarter-living/how-to-host-your-family-own-personal-summer-camp.html>

Resources for Families and Programs During School Closures

National Summer Learning Association

<https://www.summerlearning.org/resources-for-programs-and-families-during-school-closures/>

Supporting Kids During the Coronavirus Crisis

Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-kids-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>

Virtual Field Trips

Discovery Education

<https://www.discoveryeducation.com/community/virtual-field-trips/>

Virtual School Activities

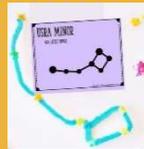
<https://virtualschoolactivities.com/>



Fun learning activities for kids to enjoy at home

Whether you're trying to avoid the dreaded "summer slide" or are just looking for a kid-sized mental tune-up, you need ideas to keep those little scholars' brains active. These learning activities for kids are so entertaining, they may not even realize how educational they are. Even better, the projects are low-prep, easy to clean up, and mostly involve common items you can find around the house. Dip into the old art-supply bin, gather up some toys, and you'll be able to whip up an educational activity in no time.

From practicing sight words to simple coding activities, these projects cover literacy, STEM, and social studies, among others, so you can focus in on your kids' particular area of interest (or subject where they need the most additional practice). The one thing they have in common is that there's some kind hands-on component to all of them, so kids can get really involved in their own learning.



Pipe Cleaner Constellations

Lots of classrooms make students create dioramas of the solar system, but what about mapping out other celestial bodies? This activity uses pipe cleaners and beads to give kids a hands-on way to learn how stars connect to form different constellations.



Binary Code Jewelry

Another coding-related activity that doesn't require a screen, this craft uses different colored beads to represent the 1s and 0s in binary numbers. Kids can convert letters into binary and "code" their names into a necklace or bracelet.



Decoder Wheel

Ready for some spy missions? An easy decoder wheel lets kids write and decipher secret messages. From there, you can move on to other types of codes, or talk about how cryptography has been used in history.



Chromatography Flowers

This is a science experiment that turns into something you'd want to display on a desk or table. Draw stripes on coffee filters with markers, then fold them up into triangles and dip the pointy end in water; the water will travel up the filter and separate the marker into different pigments, making a cool pattern on a flower-shaped filter.



Fingerprint Forensics

Leave a fingerprint on a drinking glass — it helps if your fingers are a little greasy, so pizza night is the perfect time to try this out — then have your kids use flour and a paintbrush to "dust" the glass for prints. You can even try to "lift" the fingerprint with a piece of tape and transfer it to a piece of construction paper.

For more ideas, visit <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/q32627077/learning-activities-for-kids/>.

Newsletter Sources

20 Fun Learning Activities for Kids to Enjoy at Home

Marisa Lascala, Parenting & Relationships Editor

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/g32627077/learning-activities-for-kids/>

Calm Together Blog, Calm.com

<https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>

Self-Care in the Time of Coronavirus

Rae Jacobson, Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/article/self-care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>



Summer is not completely canceled. Here are 100 things we can do with or without kids.

Katia Hetter, CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/22/health/100-things-to-do-this-summer-wellness-trnd/index.html>

The Best Chores for Kids Teach Them Helping out Is Part of Being a Family

Marisa Lascala, Parenting & Relationships Editor

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/a32702630/best-chores-for-kids/>