

Coronavirus:

Navigating a School or Daycare Closure



Overview:

Right now, public health officials are strongly encouraging “social distancing” (also known as “physical distancing”) to help slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As a result, extended closures of schools, daycares, and other childcare facilities remain a key strategy to “flatten the curve.”

This guide contains helpful information about how to manage work, children, and daily family life while your child’s school or daycare is closed.

Talk to your employer about caregiving responsibilities.

In these uncertain times, many employers are adjusting their policies around attendance, telecommuting, paid time off, and scheduling when it is feasible for them to do so. Make sure you stay informed about the actions your employer is recommending during the pandemic.

Similarly, it’s a good idea to talk to your manager in order to create a shared understanding of your caregiving responsibilities. As part of this discussion, consider the following:

- **Telecommuting.** If the nature of your job makes it possible and

you have permission, prepare to work from home while schools or daycares are closed and/or if you, your child, or another loved one who lives with you is exposed to the coronavirus or becomes ill. A number of employers are increasingly amenable to this idea, as “social distancing” is a highly encouraged strategy for slowing the spread of coronavirus; working remotely can also reduce the risk of workplace exposure.

- **Flex-time arrangements.** Whether you are working inside or outside of your home, you might consider staggering your hours, days, or workweeks in a way that makes it easier

to care your children or share responsibilities if other adults are in the home. This could comprise starting and ending your workday earlier or later, working “split shifts,” working longer shifts on fewer days, shorter shifts on more days, or taking a day off during the workweek in exchange for completing work on a Saturday or Sunday. Your manager may be able to help you devise a plan that works well for both your employer and family.

- **Back-up care.** Some employers offer back-up childcare as part of their benefits package. Connect to your human resources, benefits, or work-life department to find out if

this benefit is available to you. Be aware, however, that as public health officials' recommendations for social distancing increase, back-up care facilities or options may also become unavailable or restricted for use by "essential employees" only.

- **Paid time off.** Depending on individual childcare or employment circumstances, there may be days when going into work simply isn't feasible for you. It's a good idea to talk to your manager in advance about this possibility so that you are aware of your employer's policies and/or can ensure that the needs of your department or team will be met.
- **Leave.** If you or a family member does become ill, requiring a lengthy recovery, consider whether taking a family or medical leave is possible. Leave is required by federal law for companies of a certain size and covered under state law in a growing number of states. A growing number of companies are also offering paid leave. Check with your employer to find out what type(s) of leave applies to your particular circumstances. Now, with the federal government and many states declaring a "state of

emergency," provisions are now or soon will be in place to help with paid leave and other work-related supports.

💡 **Communicate with your child's school or daycare.**

If your child's care center, school, or university has closed, be sure you understand what, if anything, will be expected of your child until the facility reopens.

Currently, many public and private schools are using Google Classroom or other online learning portals to help students continue their lessons during school closures or individual quarantines. Others are sending assignments home in the form of paper-based learning packets, particularly if a family has limited digital access. If you are unsure about what is expected of your child, consider calling the school or district, or reaching out to your child's teacher(s) to find out. Additionally, be sure to check the daycare's or school district's website frequently for updates about when the school will reopen.

If you have a child who attends a college or university, be aware that most of them are moving exclusively to online classes, either for a limited duration or for the entire Spring 2020 semester. Many are also opting to close dormitories. Check the university

website regularly for up-to-date information.

💡 **Make fun and entertaining activities available for your child.**

School closures combined with social or physical distancing can potentially lead to very bored and/or anxious kids – especially if Mom or Dad is working from home and not readily available for entertainment.



! **Quick Tips**

Spend time outdoors! Fresh air and exercise promote both physical and mental health. Going outside also provides a way for your family to leave your home while still practicing "social distancing."



In addition, to tending to necessary schoolwork, this may be a good time to stock up on plenty of fun activities to help keep your child busy and entertained. Focused activities can also help manage a child's anxiety. Here are a few suggestions:

- Age-appropriate craft projects
- Art supplies, including crayons, colored pencils, watercolor paint, paint brushes, paper, coloring books, playdough, or molding clay, etc.
- Board games
- Cooking/baking supplies and age-appropriate recipes
- Educational and/or age-appropriate videos, movies, and television shows
- Educational apps and games
- Sporting equipment or games to play outdoors

Ensure both you and your child are able to get work done.

Continuing to stay productive when everyone is at home together can be a challenge for adults and children alike. Consider creating a sense of structure in your home by scheduling your family's daily or weekly activities. Your family schedule may include specific times that are blocked out for sleep, family meals together, chores to be completed, study or work, quiet time for activities like crafts or reading, and family activities. Consider creating the schedule together, posting it somewhere where it will be visible to your child, and having him or her check off each item or activity block as it is completed.

If you have a young child or a child who is non-verbal, visual schedules may be preferable to

written ones. A morning checklist, evening checklist, or "if, then" board can help you build more predictable routines.

If your child is learning at home, and completing homework tends to be a challenge, you might consider using the "mirroring" strategy. Mirroring is a technique in which you and your child work quietly alongside each other as a means of helping one another stay on task. Conveniently, setting aside blocks of time when both you and your child are working can help boost your productivity, too.

Find childcare if you are an essential worker or can't work remotely.

With many childcare centers closing temporarily right now, continue to check your state's website for updates; many states are moving to emergency child-care centers, especially for medical personnel, critical staff, and other essential workers who are unable to perform their jobs from home. If you can avoid using childcare during the pandemic, including the help of friends and family, do so. If this simply is not possible for you, however, sharing and/or trading childcare responsibilities with loved



! Quick Tips

Use daily or weekly schedules to foster household structure and help everyone stay productive. Schedule time for work, as well as time with your child or children.

Don't expect perfection in all areas of life right now. These are not typical times. You're doing your best, and that's enough.

ones or other members of your community may be your only option.

If you are sharing childcare responsibilities with another family, involve as few people as possible. This strategy assumes, of course, that all children and adults involved are currently healthy, symptom-free, and/or in a lower-risk category. Be sure to be diligent about taking the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of illness.

💡 Don't expect perfection.

These are not typical times. Consequently, we can't necessarily hang on to our usual expectations without causing ourselves and our children undue stress. Now is not

the time to expect perfection in all areas of life. You might just have to throw that carefully crafted schedule out the window on some days, or all days. You can try again tomorrow. Or not. And it's okay.

The house might be messier than it usually is. Your child might use more screen time than you'd normally allow. You might struggle to balance parenting or the care of loved ones with your work; some days you'll feel more competent in one of these areas than you will in another. And the next day, the balance may skew in the opposite direction. That's also okay.

If you find yourself running on empty sooner than usual with the

added stress this pandemic has created, practicing mindfulness may help. Consider downloading a meditation app, such as [Headspace](#), [Insight Timer](#), or [Calm](#). YouTube also has guided meditations available and options for practicing focused, calm breathing.

Like everyone else right now, you're doing the best that you can. And the best that you can is good enough.

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