

*With schools closed, many of us are facing the challenges of teaching our children at home for the first time. While our schools and teachers are working hard to provide lessons and resources, we may still feel overwhelmed by the prospect of our children learning at home. We reached out to Jennifer Frost, head of the Haven Scholastic homeschooling group in West Haven and founder of the college counseling company College Fit, for her advice.*

To the parents who find themselves in the midst of quarantine schooling:

If you are feeling anxious or struggling with teaching your children at home, you are not alone in what you are feeling. Despite being a seasoned homeschool mom, our family also has new challenges to conquer during the COVID-19 quarantine. Please be gracious to yourself and to your family. Everyone is adjusting. Right now you may just be surviving, but my hope is you will tap into both internal and external resources and start thriving.

One important thing will be to set up **rhythms** that work for your family. Notice that I use the word rhythm, not schedule. I highly recommend using blocks of time, rather than measuring activities minute by minute. (That said, if a minute-by-minute schedule makes you and your children thrive and feel successful, then do that!) My recommendation is to have some days when you focus on the easy, delightful things. Does your child love art? Let them have a block of time three days a week for art. Then use two days a week, say Tuesday and Thursday, to focus on skills where they have weaknesses or limited understanding. Is reading a struggle? Take time to read to them first thing in the morning and then add in two sessions of reading help. This sort of rhythm works for children from pre-K all the way through high school.

I also suggest setting time aside to connect meaningfully with your children at least twice during the day. For example, read a book aloud. Once this becomes part of the rhythm of your day, your kids will be begging you to read to them. Another example would be to play charades after dinner. Let the kids write out the prompts.

Here are a few tips I find especially helpful:

### **1. Mouths to Feed**

- Enlist help from your child or children with creating a weekly meal plan, then shop together using an online grocery delivery service. This is a wonderful learning opportunity!
- Have the children be responsible for their dishes for at least one meal.
- Establish snack times. We love cookies and tea with afternoon history lessons.
- Use one water bottle per child per day.
- Set one night a week to have a special dessert that you and one child make together.

### **2. Concerns About Screen Time**

Screens are not your enemy right now! There are so many screen-based learning options, from typing tutorials to online classes from top universities. We are taking advantage of the videos of former NASA engineer Mark Rober on YouTube live at 1pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for science time. Let's face it...we may not have access to many safe chemistry projects at home! Budget this screen time into your day when you can be hands off. If you can't leave your child unattended with a device, then consider setting up an app to control time and content. And remember, podcasts and audiobooks do not count as screen time. Check out

Libby/Overdrive and Hoopla. The Library provides free access to thousands of titles from these online providers.

### **3. Sanity and Self-Care**

Set aside a quiet time of day when everyone has to separate from each other. This is a great time for audiobooks, a special toy, or coloring books and pencils or crayons. (I find it's best to avoid markers for children 7 and under during quiet time.) Older kids could video chat with friends during this time.

Remember that you know your child best; you always have. Do not let the anxiety of unknowns or the pressure of being responsible for your child's education overwhelm you. You are only responsible for loving and caring for your child. The rest will happen naturally. Home is their safe place. Create rhythms that you will all miss when quarantine is over. This is a time when they can escape from peer pressure and grow in leaps and bounds. Ask your child what they miss the most. Ask what they are looking forward to. Ask them what they want to learn more about and then create the environment for that to happen.

It is a well-known concept that we grow the most in the midst of challenges. Ask yourself in the morning how you can grow today. There are so many ways to make lemonade out of lemons. You are much more capable than you give yourself credit for. Your children will learn in the midst of this, and hopefully they will learn that their parent(s) love them more than anyone else. And if they happen to tell you they hate you and that you are stupid during this time, don't take it personally! Keep pressing on with love, and try to establish new rhythms. Guilt, anxiety, and fear kill growth. Focus on what you do have and on the strengths of your kids. This is a time to watch and admire those strengths. If you focus on what is lacking, that is all you will see.

If you find that you are in need of help, please reach out. There are many local agencies that are still available to provide resources.

Take it from a homeschool mom who also runs a business from home: you can do this!

Jennifer Frost  
Founder, College Fit