

Family Activities for Extended Days At Home

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“Loving Earth Parenting”
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Fill-my-bucket list Get together with your kids and draw up a (fill my) 'bucket list' of things they want to do during quarantine. You can just write it as a long list that you tick off, or you can chart it in other creative ways, including different points allocated for different activities and trying, for example, to reach 100 Happy Points, over your time together. The key here is that you are engaging with them and getting not just their buy-in but really taking into account their feelings, their needs and their wishes.

Rhythm Consciously create a rhythm to your days. Schools do this (Steiner schools are, famously, built around this, for example... but all schools rely on predictability, like this). For us - in our homeschooling - we build in little touchstone moments, segments the kids love, come to expect and look forward to, sprinkled through the day. We are not super rigid with it, we are flexible and bend. But we have favorite rituals and activities we come back to most days (at *roughly* the same time). Examples for us include: a family board game in the morning (seriously, my youngest will literally bring a game to me while I am still in bed sometimes. Win-win. He gets connection. I get a lie-in. Home educating has its perks); 'magical reading hour' (more about that, in a moment) - which we literally ring in with a bell, each time; daily green smoothie; piano practice and Special Time (again, more about that in a mo). All of these segments come at an expected point in our routine. There is a flow to our days and that makes everything easier.

Read Aloud We do 'magical reading hour', as we say. Reading aloud to/with your kids has so many benefits from building their attention span and vocab to nurturing empathy, creativity and imagination as well as providing a launch pad for myriad deep, juicy discussions about history, politics, music, social context, etc..., not to mention literary analysis, of course!

Bake and cook together! Because it's fun... and then you can eat it!

Time in nature You have to be apart from other people... that does not mean you cannot be apart in a forest or field or beach. As long as you are somewhere on your own with your kids, it counts. And nature is just the best way to re-set, re-energize and spend HOURS playing without even remembering or thinking about screens. In fact, if the kids are squabbling and you add space, that is often enough to completely change the mood, giving them a new focus as naturally they take to climbing, racing and imaginative play in the woods (for example).

Facetime Playdates with Family and Friends Anything to give the kids (and you) some extra connection and FaceTime with people they love and who love them AND to give you 15 minutes off to think or, you know, go to the toilet.

Special Time This is the awesome sauce that relieves behavioral issues and sibling rivalry. It's quite simple but incredibly powerful. Set a timer and spend a short amount of time (usually between 10 and 20 minutes - certainly not more than 30) giving your COMPLETE attention to ONE child. That is key. It is one-to-one with a guarantee of no interruptions (especially by the other sibling/s). AND the kid gets to lead 100%. It is their time, their choice. They get to choose what to play or not play. You can have some safety limits but that really should be it. □ This is about them. They lead. You follow. Your main job is to pour your DELIGHT into your child. Focus on what THEY are interested in, for those 10-20 minutes. Be positive and supportive. Do not fix, rescue or 'adjust' their ideas, plans and creations. Your warm attention and joyful connection is like balm for their soul. And as you 'fill their happiness bucket' in this way, you really re-set them emotionally and have a way bigger chance of seeing the best of them in the hours to come. A connected child is a contented and cooperative child. Now, sometimes Special Time creates so much safety that it actually allows kids to show us MORE of their pent-up emotions/tears/tantrums. That's another story. That's them being smart and using your attention to offload those feelings... Know that Special Time is a real go-to for maintaining a connected family.

Music Music is healing and uplifting. Play music, sing, dance. Explore music linked to books you are reading together. Have a dance party in the kitchen. Make up songs. Pick up some instruments and have an impromptu jam session.

Play. Play. Play. Do as much full-body roughhousing style play as you can pull off. Play tag, hide-and-seek, wrestle, have pillow fights, sock fights, balloon pong, bucking bronco, airplanes, wacky races. Even if you just do 5 minutes a day but do it with your full heart your kids will thank you. The more you all giggle together, the happier your time together will be - not just in those moments, but after, too, as laughter is really one of the best ways to relieve stress.

Follow some YouTube Tutorials They can guide you step-by-step in art, crafts or science projects, even if you don't have the foggiest where to begin with these. This can provide a whole focus for a day or week's worth of self-paced projects. Let them choose so you are sure it is something THEY want to do. Do it with them (for more connection) or let it be one thing they do on their own, while you use the time to catch up on chores or your own work or what have you.

Daily Challenges If you are trying to get some education in - which they might resist if they're used to associating school with (enforced) learning and you with time off, of course - one way that some kids find fun is to have a daily challenge up on a board. My kids love this... not least because it is always optional. They get to do it if and when it feels fun to engage with. Freedom to come at it when they want to is a huge part of why they love it, though, for sure.

Milk the Resources Browse through and find educational apps, books on tape, documentaries, board games, online sudoku, logical problems, activity books, etc...

Listening Partnerships, Support and Connection for You! You won't be able to take good care of the kids and create 'wonder & joy' at home, if you are overwhelmed, underwater emotionally or just struggling. Do whatever you can to top up YOUR cup. Listening Partnerships are free, can be done online and are such a great way to offload tension and re-find your own center.

Self-Care Meditate, do some yoga, chant, sing and dance for you... on your own or WITH the kids. It's about keeping yourself as grounded and uplifted as you can. The more resourced you are, the better you'll be able to respond to your kids AND be creative about making this a positive time they remember, growing up, as having been if not 'super fun' at least strewn with magical moments!!

Surprises Rhythm is important. So is being crazy, spontaneous and surprising your kids. Mix it up. Randomly do one dinner by candlelight; or do a movie-night with popcorn and them camp out in the living room overnight; have an impromptu game of charades; or let them wake up to a to a string of clues or a treasure map to find their breakfast stuffs. Have fun with it.