

ELT RESOURCES REVIEW

What's a Parent to Do?

Ideas for Parents and Children who are at Home for an Extended Period of Time



Sharryn Larsen

Walker is a Professor of Literacy at Central Washington University. Her primary teaching and research interests include children's literature, literacy teacher preparation, and early literacy development. Permission granted to share on school and social sites and to translate.

sharryn.walker@cwu.edu

Many parents are wondering how to provide relevant educational experiences for their children while they are at home for an extended period during the COVID-19 pandemic. I pass along these tips and ideas in hopes of easing some of the stress parents and children might be feeling as their daily routines are rearranged. The ideas are to inspire experiences for you and your children in many of the school subjects.

Let's Start Off with Some General Tips

- ✓ **Don't make the experiences like "school."** Consider the time together to be extended family time. Making it too much like school may cause more tension within your family dynamics.
- ✓ **Avoid worksheets.** Having your child complete worksheets might be too much like school. They often are just busy work and do not promote a sense of independent learning. Make the experiences interactive.
- ✓ **Establish a routine.** Children like routine-it gives them a sense of security. This includes some "quiet alone time." Include this in each day so you can all take a break from each other.
- ✓ **Allow choice.** When engaging in any of the activities listed below let your child choose as much as possible. That will make the experience more motivating and interesting for your student.
- ✓ **Limit screen time.** Provide authentic experiences with books and materials for you and your child.
- ✓ **Provide outside time.** Teach your children some of the games you may have played as a child (Red Light, Green Light; various forms of tag; jump rope, marbles; jacks); get the yard ready for spring by raking and weeding; prepare a spot for planting a small garden.
- ✓ **Have fun and enjoy your time together!**

Create a Notebook

Creating a notebook in which your child can document her/his activities each day helps with establishing routine, as well as documenting this worldwide experience. I suggest using a composition notebook as it is sturdier than a spiral notebook. Make the notebook personal by having your child decorate the cover with magazine pictures, family photos, or construction paper designs. You can cover the artwork with strips of clear packing tape to protect it.

Write Table of Contents on the first page and save the next three (3) pages for the Table of Contents. As your child engages in an activity, s/he can record it in the notebook and write the page number in the Table of

Contents. You can number the pages of the notebook as your child records the experiences. Record the date of the entry. This notebook will essentially become a diary of this time in history.

Reading

These two types of reading should occur each day:

1. Reading Aloud - Take time to read aloud to your children each day. This is an excellent “winding down” time before bed. Take the 10-20 minutes before bedtime to sit and read a story together. You could read a favorite picture book, or perhaps choose a novel you can read together as a family (this depends on the age and the number of children at home).
2. Reading Alone - Your child should read alone (or spend time with books, depending on age) for 15-20 minutes each day. Let your child choose what s/he wants to read. Because our brains work differently when we read from different types of text, I highly recommend this time is spent reading from printed material (books or magazines for instance)-not from a screen. Your child can document what s/he read each day in the notebook.

What to Read?

We read for three reasons:

1. Entertainment - We read for pure enjoyment. Expand what your child reads to include joke books, poetry books, and graphic novels, for instance.
2. Information - We read to learn something. Here your child can read informational books (about their favorite animals, for instance), or newspaper articles.
3. “How to” do something - This is where we read to follow directions. Think cooking, science experiments, and crafts. The text is short, yet technical in each of these areas. Be adventurous! Make foods from different cultures! Complete messy science experiments outside!

How to Access Books

Since many libraries are closed, here are a few things you can do to access books.

- ✓ See if your local library is mailing books to patrons.
- ✓ Look for “free little libraries” in your neighborhood. You can borrow books from there. If not, perhaps create one of your own to support the exchange of books.
- ✓ Check out your local thrift stores.
- ✓ While keeping your social distance, organize a book exchange with another family.
- ✓ Half-Price Books will give credit for books brought in to sell. Your child can clean out her/his bookshelf, earn credit and choose books from the store.

Math

Math is more than addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. There are various websites available in which children can practice math. Those are listed in the Resources section below. Do puzzles to help with spatial concepts. Ideas for other math skill areas are listed in the next section.

Base Other School Content in a “Field Trip”

- ✓ Organizing the experiences around a topic deepens the learning for your child and helps her/him make connections between content areas.
- ✓ While we are to keep our social distance, that does not mean we have to stay inside all the time. Explore your backyard with a close look. Many of us have not spent time exploring our own backyard. Take a walk around the neighborhood. When out walking, provide a community service by picking up trash. Gather rocks, pinecones or other interesting items to make art projects. Talk about what you see. Speculate why there is a crack in the sidewalk, or why that tree is growing the way it is, or how your town or neighborhood was named. Stomp in the puddles. If you go to the grocery store, talk about your favorite foods and where the food comes. Shop for the items you need to cook a recipe from a cookbook.
- ✓ One short field trip can provide days of activities. You could do a math activity, a writing activity (they may take several days to write one type of story or essay), do an art project...You won’t do each of these activities every day. Let your child choose.

Ideas from the “Field Trip”

Math

- ✓ Look for patterns in your house, in your backyard, neighborhood, grocery store.
- ✓ Let your child weigh grocery items. Talk about the price per pound. Estimate how much those apples will cost.
- ✓ Build a birdhouse. Go to the hardware store and buy some construction materials. Weigh the nails. Estimate the cost of materials. The hardware store may just give you scraps of lumber for your child’s building project.
- ✓ Talk about the items on sale at the grocery store. Do mental math (or let your child use the calculator) to find out cost savings.
- ✓ Choose a recipe from a cookbook and have your child budget the cost before going to the grocery store. Have your child write the list and shop for

the items. Cook the chosen recipe and enjoy as a family!

Encourage your child to record in the notebook what s/he learned about math based on the field trip.

Writing

Just as our brain works differently when we read from printed text as opposed to digital text, so it does when we write. I highly recommend that your child write with the hand. Much thinking happens between the hand and the brain when we write as opposed to typing.

In school your child will write at least four types of text:

- Narrative (a story)
- Informational (information about a topic)
- Opinion/Argumentative (For younger children this is often in the form of “I Like” writings. For older students they will take a position on a topic and write a “for” or “against” essay.)
- Poetry (There are many types of poetry and very few of them rhyme. You can read poetry to your child and then write a poem in the same format as the poem you read.)

From your field trip experience your child could:

- ✓ Narrative - Write a story about playing in the back yard, going to the grocery store, ... Instead of writing about the whole experience, help your child choose a “small moment” from the trip. This is a term frequently used in school. S/he will be impressed that you used that term!
- ✓ Informational - Have your child research how your neighborhood or town was named or how the food gets to the grocery store. They could research different types of birds and the housing they need. They can record their findings in the notebook.
- ✓ Opinion/Argumentative - Perhaps your child could write a letter to the city about why the crack in the sidewalk is a hazard and should be fixed. Younger children could write what they like about their backyard or their favorite foods.
- ✓ Poetry - They can write poems about what they saw. An Acrostic poem is an easy format in which to write. There are links to poetry forms below.
- ✓ Letter writing - Have your child write letters to friends and family you will not be able to see during this time. Have your child let them know what they have been doing.

Keep the writings in the notebook (except for the letters, of course). Walk to the mailbox to send the letters.

Science

- ✓ Your child can read informational books about what you saw on your field trip.
- ✓ Look for science experiments (how-to) text that relate to a topic.
- ✓ Research scientists and their discoveries. Be sure to include diverse perspective.

- ✓ Pull out the binoculars and magnifying glasses. What do you see?
- ✓ Plan and plant a garden.
- ✓ Dig a hole. What can be found there? Fill it back up. How is the ground different than before the hole was dug?

Record the activities in the notebook.

Social Studies

- ✓ Your child can make a map of the backyard, your walking path, neighborhood, or of the grocery store. Or they could make a map of a make-believe setting or the setting of the book they are reading. Have your child draw the map on graph paper in order to practice working to scale.
- ✓ Researching the history of your area as mentioned in the writing section is a social studies activity.
- ✓ Researching about historical events and people would also be relevant here. Be sure to include diverse perspectives.
- ✓ Teach your child how to read a physical road map. They could “plan a trip” based on the state road map.
- ✓ Participate in a service project. Pick up trash. Make “happy cards” and perhaps tape them outside the windows of those in residential facilities (call beforehand to see if this is OK); bring up a neighbor’s trash can; rake the neighbor’s yard. Just look around your neighborhood to see what might need attention.

Record the activities in the notebook.

The Arts

- ✓ Make collages from the items picked up in the backyard or field trip.
- ✓ Make collages with magazine pictures or construction paper about the topics being researched.
- ✓ Build a fort with blankets and furniture. This will become a great reading area. Let your child sleep overnight in the fort.
- ✓ Have a public reading from what your child has written. Make it an event with a stage (in your living room or on the hearth) and food.
- ✓ Have your child create a poster using the argumentative information or a poem from the writing experiences.
- ✓ Use household items to make instruments. Find a favorite song that is on the topic of field trip and tap out the pattern/rhythm. Record in the notebook.
- ✓ Encourage your child to make up her/his own rhythm. Then have the child make up symbols for each of the sounds in the rhythm. Then have your child record it in the notebook and play it back “reading” the music.
- ✓ Put on some music and just dance! This is a fun

family activity.

- ✓ Get out the watercolors and paint!
- ✓ Get tools, nails, and scrap lumber for the hardware store and just build something. Just pounding nails into wood broadens the imagination. Use a measuring tape to integrate other math skills.
- ✓ Use marshmallows and dry spaghetti to make structures.
- ✓ Paint the rocks you collected on your field trip.

Participate in the [Kindness Project](#).

Record the activities in the notebook.

Here Are Some Other Ideas You Might Enjoy

- ✓ Tell family stories-Tell your child about the day s/he was born. Depending on the age of your child, s/he or you can write down the notes from this story. Look up newspaper articles from that day and glue them in the notebook so your child has a record of the special day.
- ✓ Write a list of interview questions for a family member. Have your child call the family member (grandparents, for instance). Record what you learned about the family member's life. Your child could then write up the information and send it back to the interviewee.
- ✓ Perform a Readers' Theatre. Aaron Shepard has

many free scripts on his site. The site is listed below.

- ✓ Have your child dress up as the scientist or historical figure and share the "biography" of that person.
- ✓ You can record these performances and send them to family and friends.
- ✓ Or you could learn how to translate this into a digital story.
- ✓ Play card games and board games together.
- ✓ Learn how to code. There are websites for children to learn how to do this. You can learn along!
- ✓ For students who are taking a foreign language, encourage them to listen and read aloud children's books in that language. As they may be beginning language learners, regardless of age, reading children's books is quite appropriate.

The above experiences are just suggestions. Choose to do things you and your child will enjoy doing together.

Most of all, *have fun!* Enjoy this time together! Create some lifetime memories!

When your children are older, at some point they will start a conversation with, "Remember when we all had to stay home, and we...?"

Resources

Reading and Writing

- ✓ Check your library system to see what books are available online as many libraries are now closed to patrons.
- ✓ [Storyline Online](#)
- ✓ [Magic Keys](#)
- ✓ [Epic](#) (This is a pay site for parents, but free for teachers. If your child's teacher has an account, your child should be able to log in.)
- ✓ [International Children's Digital Library](#) (Books from around the world in many languages available for free)
- ✓ [News ELA](#) (A news site for students offering free content for the rest of the 2019/2020 school year)
- ✓ [Jokes](#)
- ✓ [Poems](#)
- ✓ [Readers' Theatre](#)

Writing Sites

- ✓ [Literate for life](#) includes links to five writing sites
- ✓ [Poetry Forms](#)

Content Area Sites

- ✓ [iCivics](#) (Created by Supreme Courts Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, iCivics is a free, interactive site where children can learn about civics).
- ✓ [PBS](#) (Multiple Links to various PBS shows)
- ✓ [National Geographic Kids](#)
- ✓ [Animal Planet](#) (This site is for the channel, but you can find when animal shows are on that you can watch as a family. That could be your "field trip" from which you plan other experiences. You should watch the show together so that you all have the same experience.)
- ✓ [Math](#) (A list of free math websites for kids)
- ✓ [Science](#) -- Great science websites for kids.
- ✓ [Science 2](#)
- ✓ [Science 3](#)
- ✓ [Coding](#)
- ✓ [Cursive Writing](#) (Many children are interested in learning cursive, yet it is not often taught in schools. Most cursive writing programs recommend late second grade/beginning third grade as the place to start. Here are some sites you can work through together. Some are free and some are not.)