

WECAN Suggestions for Parents of Young Children When School is Closed

March 23, 2020

This time at home with limited access to organized group activities is very unique. We hope that rather than simply being a hardship for families it will lead to a new understanding of how you can best provide for and be with your children. Children haven't ever really needed organized activities and entertainment. They need the adults in their lives to be present for them and provide love and guidance. They need time to explore the world on their own terms, take small risks, make messes, clean them up and develop a sense of their own capacities. This time could be a gift for families to discover new ways of being together.

We hope the following suggestions are helpful to you:

- **Rhythm:** Make a plan for the day and stick to it consistently, as best you can. Work loosely with the timing of daily school events (especially meals and rest), at home. That will ease the transition back to school when the time comes. Keep it simple! The activities themselves are less important than the sequence of events having consistency.
- **Loving Guidance:** Be clear about the fact that you are in charge, you have responsibility and will make decisions for your children. They can then relax and find their way within the boundaries you have set for them.
- **Practical Activities:** If possible, do chores like preparing food, cleaning the house and laundry together with your child. Give your child daily chores that he or she can do independently. Tasks that children likely take up daily at school include cleaning up their toys when playtime is over, setting and clearing the table (not just their own things), and self-care (toileting, changing clothes and putting away their things independently).
- **Long Walks:** Go for long walks each day as a family. Time in nature and exercise are proven to reduce stress and improve both mental and physical health. Dedicating time to a daily walk will give a positive boost to your child's attitude and behavior for the remainder of the day. It also supports good sleep!
- **Free Play Indoors and Out:** Free, undirected play is critical for a child's healthy development. We recognize this might be more difficult for some children without their social group. Give them access to open-ended play things and space in which to make a mess, make noise and explore the world through play. Sand, dirt and water with some

old pots, scoops and shovels can provide hours of fun outdoors. Designate a spot in your yard in which your child can dig and make a nice mess! Fill a large bowl or plastic bin with warm soapy water and a few different metal cups or bowls. A large empty box can provide hours of play ideas indoors. Resist interactive electronic toys and those that have a specific purpose and therefore limit imagination. Minimize toys available and rotate them every week or two if needed. Get them started with a play idea and then start working on something tangible of your own nearby. That way they will feel you are available if they need you but you will not be responsible for entertaining them.

- **Let Boredom Happen:** Boredom is the seed for new things to come - let it happen. If it goes on too long and you are being pestered, stop whatever else you're doing and take up some practical work together such as sweeping, dusting or washing windows. Or know that your child may need your full attention in that moment. Sometimes just being present with your child for a few full moments, allows them to reset and go back to their play. This commonly inspires new ideas!

- **Quiet, Nap or Rest Time:** Keeping a rest time on the schedule every day will be very helpful for you and your child. You will each need your time alone during these weeks! We encourage you to set yourself up for success by implementing a rhythmic set of activities that lead to this independent quiet time (whether the child be sleeping or playing quietly alone in a bedroom). For instance: eat lunch, clear and wash the table, use the restroom, wash the face and hands with a warm washcloth, settle in bed, read or tell a story, rub child's feet and leave the room. If they do not sleep, make it clear what your expectation is for them during this time.

- **Turn Off Electronics:** We very strongly encourage you to resist the urge to entertain your children with screen time. This is not supportive to their overall development and will very likely make their time (and yours) more difficult in the long run. Please consider unplugging or disabling voice-activated devices as well. For children to make demands and get instant gratification from a machine is not helpful to their budding social awareness or their sense of causality.

- **Keep Adult Conversation Among Adults:** Children need protection from the anxieties of our adult world. Please keep them away from the news at this sensitive time. If you need to speak with them about the current health situation, find ways to do so that are simple and age-appropriate. They should know that the adults are taking care of things and they do not need to worry.