

LEARNING IN LOCKDOWN

Teaching children during lockdown can be challenging. Associate Professor for Engagement in STEM, educator, and parent **Martin Khechara** advises.

Well, here we are again. At the time of writing, it's lockdown number three. We are limiting contact with other people, panicking when we have forgotten our facemask when

we go shopping for food and trying our best to keep up with Joe Wicks on YouTube. We are all working hard doing extra hours to get the job done and then of course the schools have been closed. We have unwittingly become teachers again and our children are looking to us to help them study. Most of us have no teaching experience and the very prospect of stepping into those shoes is daunting, but it doesn't have to be hard. With patience, organisation and a bit of imagination it can be as rewarding for parents and carers as it is for younger people.

I am an educator and have worked in higher education teaching biomedical science for 13 years. Like many people now in higher education, I work from home. I also have two fantastic boys who have been learning at a distance through the school closures and even knowing a thing or two about education doesn't make the whole process of home schooling easier, especially when coping with a busy work schedule. Hopefully, the schools will be reopening in the coming days, but with COVID-19 outbreaks in schools set to cause further closures, here are my top tips for coping with home schooling in the lockdown.

Make a special space to work in, if you can

Working from the kitchen table is no good for anyone. If you have a space to

make into a place for learning then do it. It means your young learner has his or her own place for work, can be supervised, it isn't in your workspace and you don't have to tidy up before teatime every day.

Make a routine and set the rules

It is important to set expectations right from the start. Routine is essential for getting the best out of learning at home. Two to four hours of concentrated learning a day is plenty, so make a schedule. After all, with breaks and disruptions this is what some children get at school anyway.

Do not be afraid to talk to teachers

We are not experts in the national curriculum, but teachers are. If you need advice, speak to your child's teachers. They are there to help and can give you loads of good guidance about how to get the most out of lessons at home.



Get outside; the world is the best classroom

Learning is all about context and doing. Exploring subjects first hand, especially for the sciences, is invaluable. The world is your laboratory and your classroom. Cooking cakes is chemistry and the natural world is just outside the front door. Learning is all around us and the concepts that are taught particularly in the subjects of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) are literally at your fingertips. Go for a drive and talk about acceleration and forces, go for a walk to look at natural adaptation to different environments and animals and



stay up late to look up and wonder at the universe. With just a bit of imagination you can become a better science communicator than anybody on the BBC.

Do not re-invent the wheel:

During the lockdowns there has been so much content made to help people learn at home, so use it if you can. Much of it is produced by professional educationalists and is curriculum-linked. A good example is the STEM Response Team at the University of Wolverhampton who have been creating content for people to use at home since the first lockdown.

Please be flexible

Although we might have a timetable and a lovely organised workspace, things can go wrong. Life gets in the way; it is just how it is. Don't worry if you have to have time-out. Go for a walk and switch off, be together and just come back to it. There's always time to catch up later and we are under enough stress as it is already. Just make sure if live teaching online is involved that you might miss, you let your teachers know you cannot attend. It's only polite after all, and in the world


“With just a bit of imagination you can become a better science communicator than anybody on the BBC”

before COVID we would send a note in, wouldn't we?

Do not put yourself down

Remember you are doing your best. Try not to feel you are not doing a good job. Don't worry if you have to look up information for simple things you should

already know, or you can't think of an elegant way to explain something. Just remember, you are spending time together. Enjoy it; after all when do you get to spend this kind of one-to-one time with each other? Even if it does feel stressful now, the time you spend together will pay dividends later.

It's a different world for us all and we are all coping in different ways and for those of us who are supporting young learners it can be a daunting and sometimes difficult experience. There is loads of help out there and you are not alone. It's not always going to be like this and once it is all over, although there have been so many negatives the positive is that we have been there for the children and have had a true hand in their future. 

Martin Khechara is a Fellow of the IBMS and British Science Association Media Fellow for 2020–21

