

# HOW TO COPE WITH THE STRESS OF HOMESCHOOLING (FOR PARENTS)

Homeschooling can feel like uncharted territory, particularly if you're doing it because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's completely normal to feel stressed, uncertain, and overwhelmed about the days to come. While homeschooling can be a bit unpredictable at times, you can put your best foot forward by developing a simple routine and not putting too much pressure on yourself or your kids.

## ADJUST YOUR MINDSET

### GET SUPPORT FROM OTHER PARENTS AND HOMESCHOOL TEACHERS.

If you've been out of school for a while and suddenly find yourself with the role of "teacher," you probably feel pretty overwhelmed. Thankfully, there are a lot of resources you can take advantage of. Post on forums or join social media groups dedicated to homeschooling during the pandemic. The people there can be a wealth of knowledge and support! You might also talk to parents who regularly homeschool their kids to get a better idea of what their schedule and learning objectives look like.

### REMIND YOURSELF WHY YOU'RE HOMESCHOOLING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

Instead of viewing your situation as homeschooling, view it as a necessary part of keeping your children safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's okay if you struggle a bit—what's most important is keeping your family healthy. Homeschooling can be tough, especially if you're adjusting to a crisis like COVID-19. On the more stressful days, remind yourself that you're helping your children stay educated and well-adjusted during an uncertain time.

### PRACTICE GRATITUDE ON A DAILY BASIS WITH YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

Take a few minutes with your kids to write out or sketch something that each of you is thankful for. Additionally, plan out 1 thing you want to accomplish during the day, along with one thing you can stop worrying about.<sup>1</sup> For instance, you can say something like: "I'm thankful for the opportunity to spend more time with my family. Today, I'm going to help my kids with a science experiment. I'm going to forget about any stress and meltdowns from yesterday and make today the best it can possibly be."

### ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS.

Try not to expect the world of yourself or your children. Homeschooling is tricky, and it'll only seem more stressful and overwhelming if you set your expectations sky-high. Accept the fact that your children may not be as productive as you'd like them to be, which is okay.<sup>2</sup> Don't expect your kids to sit and study for 8 hours each day. Instead, focus on giving them an engaging, thorough education that meshes with your own work schedule.

### SWITCH UP YOUR TEACHING STYLE IF YOUR KIDS AREN'T INTERESTED.

Pay attention to how your kids react and engage with each lesson. Certain teaching styles may not resonate well with your children—if this is the case, don't be afraid to change it up. Make your lessons more hands-on, or include more visual guides. Keep a close eye on your kids and see what types of lessons resonate with them the most.<sup>3</sup> For instance, if your kids aren't a fan of reading out loud, have them listen to audiobooks instead. If your children aren't engaged with a lecture, add in some posters and visual aids. Or, if your kids seem bored and cooped up, move to the front porch or backyard for a change of scenery.

## REDUCE STRESS WITH A ROUTINE

### OUTLINE A ROUGH SCHEDULE FOR EACH DAY.

Develop some realistic goals for your family as well as your individual kids, which will help you know what to focus on for the day. With the entire household in mind, plan out a schedule that you can realistically manage and balance with other obligations you have, like your job.<sup>4</sup> For instance, you might start the day with breakfast and clean up, then let your kids work on assignments while you focus on your job. At this point, you can have lunch, followed by a bit more studying or quiet time. Finish off the day with a fun or social activity, like going for a walk or kicking a ball around outside, to keep your kids engaged.

## **DIVIDE YOUR DAY INTO LARGE BLOCKS INSTEAD OF SPECIFIC CLASSES.**

Regimented classes and segments can seem both overbearing and overwhelming and may add a lot of unnecessary stress to your schedule. Instead, try to leave your children's homeschooling schedule more open-ended. Don't schedule subjects within a certain block—instead, give yourself an open-ended period of time where you can work through multiple subjects.<sup>5</sup> For example, you can schedule one "block" of time between 8:30 AM and 1:00 PM. Instead of planning rigid timetables, plan to go through math, reading, and writing during that time. In the afternoon, you can have a second block between 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM, where you focus on science and history. Blocks offer a lot more flexibility to your schedule, which can help reduce your stress levels.

## **GIVE YOURSELF MORE TIME THAN YOU ACTUALLY NEED FOR LESSONS.**

Anticipate that you might run into roadblocks throughout the day, like an extra-challenging lesson or a temper tantrum. Factor extra time into your schedule so your child doesn't fall too far behind in their studies in the event of a big distraction. Don't beat yourself up if you can't keep to a perfect schedule—it's perfectly normal to run into issues or unexpected surprises each day.<sup>6</sup> If you think it will take 3.5 hours to teach your children math, reading, and writing, set aside 4.5 hours for the block.

## **MULTI-TASK IF YOU'RE CARING FOR MORE THAN ONE CHILD.**

Prioritize your younger kids first, as they'll need more supervision and focus. Encourage your older kids to work on their studies independently while you sort things out with your little ones. Try to sprinkle naps and breaks into your schedule to help keep your kids refreshed and ready to learn.<sup>7</sup> Teens can typically work more independently than younger kids, so they might be able to complete an assignment alone while you help another child. If you have three young children, you can encourage two of them to play together while you focus on one child. Or, if you have a baby at home, turn baby's feeding time into story time for other young children.

## **BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR DAILY ROUTINE.**

Don't be hard on yourself if things don't always go according to plan. Prepare for the unexpected, especially if you're juggling a full-time job and other responsibilities along with your homeschooling duties. Switch up the learning schedule and give your kids extra time to finish assignments if they're having trouble finishing up in one day. Going with the flow is a normal part of homeschooling, and nothing to be ashamed of.<sup>8</sup>

## **SET ASIDE SOME TIME TO UNWIND.**

Once the school and workday is over, give yourself a small chunk of time to catch your breath, relax, and do anything that helps take the edge off. Try going for a walk, drawing a warm bath, reading a book, or doing anything else that helps you chill out and organize your thoughts.<sup>9</sup> You might also arrange some time at the end of the day where you can relax with your partner and compare notes about another's days. Offer support and a listening ear to your partner's worries and share any of your own stressors or worries that you have about homeschooling. These types of conversations can really help you relieve stress on a daily basis.<sup>10</sup> If you don't have a partner, carve out some time for yourself after your kids go to bed.

# **PLAN FOR ROUGH DAYS**

## **IDENTIFY THE ROOT OF YOUR CHILD'S PROBLEMS AS THEY ARISE.**

Don't view a meltdown or temper tantrum at face value. Instead, think about any stressors that are contributing to your child's behavior. Try to separate yourself from the problem and understand that your child's issues are independent and separate from you.<sup>11</sup> For instance, if a child throws a temper tantrum, their emotions may stem from feelings of stress or being overwhelmed. If your teen seems particularly moody, they may be missing their friends or extracurricular activities.

## **WRITE A LIST OF CALMING ACTIVITIES FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN.**

Sit down with your kids and brainstorm some activities that help you all relax and unwind. These don't have to be complicated or fancy—instead, view these activities as life preservers that can rescue you from a tough situation. Place the finished list in an area where everyone can see it, like the refrigerator.<sup>12</sup> Some calming activities might be going for a walk, listening to relaxing music, or playing with a favorite toy. Teens might enjoy texting with their friends or playing a video game.

## **CALM YOUR CHILD DOWN BEFORE DISCIPLINING THEM.**

Don't lash out at your child while they're acting out or having a tantrum. Instead, help them calm down in a healthy way, like time out. Express empathy to your child, explaining that you understand how they're feeling.<sup>13</sup> Don't say things like: "You can't behave like this!" Instead, you can say something like: "I understand that you're upset, but yelling isn't going to fix anything. Let's take some deep breaths instead."

## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AS YOU GO THROUGH THE WEEK.

Pretend like you're a third-person observer in your mind. Instead of addressing every negative or stressful thought in your head, simply watch these thoughts and let them float away. Focus on staying grounded in the current moment instead of worrying about the past or future.<sup>14</sup> If you get a thought that involves worrying about your upcoming schedule for the week, let it pass instead of focusing on it.

## ASK FRIENDS AND FAMILY FOR SUPPORT IF YOU NEED IT.

Call or text your loved ones if you're having a bad day. They'll be able to offer a listening ear and some advice, especially if they have kids of their own. Above all, focus on the fact that you're not alone, and that you have plenty of loved ones who will help you get through the challenges that homeschooling has to offer.<sup>15</sup>

**WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?**

If you still feel overwhelmed, unable to cope and feel as though your stress is affecting how you function every day, you may be experiencing signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take a screen at **MHAScreening.org** to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

*This article was authored in partnership with wikiHow, the world's largest "how to" site, and also featured at [www.wikihow.com/Cope-with-the-Stress-of-Homeschooling-\(for-Parents\)](http://www.wikihow.com/Cope-with-the-Stress-of-Homeschooling-(for-Parents)).*

### SOURCES

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.familyeducation.com/school/how-homeschool/avoiding-homeschool-burnout>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/a31668169/coronavirus-homeschool-work-from-home-tips/>

<sup>5</sup><https://pambarnhill.com/best-tips-creating-homeschool-daily-schedule/>

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<sup>8</sup>[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_reduce\\_the\\_stress\\_of\\_homeschooling\\_on\\_everyone](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_reduce_the_stress_of_homeschooling_on_everyone)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/life/features/10-ways-to-deal-with-the-stress-of-homeschooling-39211701.html>

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<sup>11</sup>[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_reduce\\_the\\_stress\\_of\\_homeschooling\\_on\\_everyone](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_reduce_the_stress_of_homeschooling_on_everyone)

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<sup>14</sup><https://ggie.berkeley.edu/my-well-being/mindfulness-for-adults/>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.familyeducation.com/school/how-homeschool/avoiding-homeschool-burnout>

<sup>16</sup>[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_reduce\\_the\\_stress\\_of\\_homeschooling\\_on\\_everyone](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_reduce_the_stress_of_homeschooling_on_everyone)

<sup>17</sup><https://www.talkspace.com/blog/coronavirus-homeschooling-home-school-tips-parenting/>



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