



**ARTICLE**

# **6 things to give our children while the coronavirus keeps us at home**

**BY JESSICA BURKE**

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At the end of each spring, my husband and I spend some time considering what our children need for the next school year and how we'll help give it to them. We talk about classes, lessons, sports teams, and activities and our limited budget of both money and time. We had a good plan for this year, just like any other, except right now, even the best laid plans have gone awry.

Parents all across the world are wondering what to do with their children's abundance of time as COVID-19 has most of us at home. Many families normally outsource in several ways to give children what they need, but in an unprecedented time like this, we're finding ourselves without our usual scaffolding and support. We don't need to have special licenses or training to care for our children well in this time, but we do need to know what to give them.

**1. The gospel:** We always need the gospel more than anything else, but a scary time like this has reminded me of how desperate we are for it. Our kids are feeling the effects of their daily schedules changing suddenly, and they need to know that God is steadfast and immutable. We all need Hebrews 13:8 as a banner over us: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. The cross is sufficient for our needs right now, and our children need to be reminded of this.

More time at home may mean more quality time as a family, but it can also mean more sinning against each other. The grace that Christ has given us needs to be overflowing from Christian parents. We need to practice confession and repentance in front of our children and show them that everyone should be both a giver and receiver of forgiveness.

**2. Structure:** When I came home with my first child 14 years ago, I quickly learned that some structure to our days helps both parents and child. Giving children parameters for their day can help eliminate frustration and disappointment. And the built-in routine also allows parents some needed mental breaks. Some families work best with a schedule, but ours thrives more with a rhythm or pattern for each day. My children know when to complete their

chores and schoolwork. They know when they can play outside and have snacks. I don't have to nag them, and they don't have to ask what needs to be done. Structure also helps us make sure we are spending our time well.

**3. Ways to serve:** Children can play a vital part in keeping a home running. They are not only capable of helping out, it is good for them. Children need to recognize that their work is valuable and that others are depending on them. Work in the home and for neighbors helps children learn to lay aside their desires and to think about the needs of others. They learn that servanthood is noble and necessary work. Growing up means slowly gaining more responsibilities, and now is a great time to teach our children how to manage new tasks for the good of others.

**4. Food for their minds:** Many of my friends whose children are in traditional schools have been asking me how to continue their children's education at home. I've heard of varying levels of school work being given out. Regardless of how much your child's teachers are sending home, you don't need to recreate school at home. Help your children complete their work with excellence. Use the leftover time to dive into resources that will encourage your children to think deeply.

Just as our bodies need sustenance, so do our minds. Children don't need to be crammed with information, but they do need a feast of truth, beauty, and goodness that will cultivate their imagination and kindle their desire to learn. Give them books, music, art, and ideas that are worth coming back to again and again because of the value to our hearts and minds, not because of what we may

accomplish by having read, studied, or listened to them. But that's not to say that they won't teach us. They will instruct us in the hidden-most parts of our heart—where we consider virtue and morality.

Maybe your family will want to study the works and discoveries of a particular time period. Don't just seek facts; find ideas that lead to wonder. Read stories with noble characters who fight evil and are willing to sacrifice their lives for good. Memorize Scripture, hymns, poetry, and speeches that they can recall later when they are scared, hurting, or needing inspiration.

However your family spends the days at home, remember these children we're raising are a blessing. They are never a burden, even in the midst of hardship that no one was prepared for.

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**5. Exercise for their bodies:** One of the hardest blows for my children was when they found out their soccer season was canceled for a month. They love playing the game with their teams. We can't recreate that at home for them, but we can give them opportunities for using energy and getting exercise.

Our children will feel and learn better if they are moving their bodies and maintaining good fitness. It's easy for my children to get outside and exercise at our house, but some families may need to be more creative. The digital age has given us all sorts of workout videos and programs online, some of which can be completed with limited room. For our family, it works best to build exercise of different types into several parts of our day.

**6. Skills to practice:** After a summer break from school, I realized that one of my children had forgotten long division. It had been a struggle to teach her long division the first time, and I had to tackle it all over. I learned the hard way that some skills need to be practiced regularly, so we don't regress in them. Math and some other subjects will need to be reviewed. If your child was learning to type at school, he could use an online program to maintain or improve that skill. For the emerging readers among my children, we have a schedule for short periods of practice several times a day to help them progress forward.

What skills are your children learning? How can you help them practice? What other skills do you want them to learn with this extra time? Skills don't have to be academic to be worth their time. And if your child doesn't practice a particular skill and regresses, it's not the end of the world. Like my daughter who forgot long division, if they learned it once, they can learn it again.

However your family spends the days at home, remember these children we're raising are a blessing. They are never a burden, even in the midst of hardship that no one was prepared for. This is a great opportunity for us to love our children and to point them to the cross as we spend our days at home. We're all going to make mistakes as we try to figure out how to use our time, but grace is abundant.

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## Jessica Burke

Jessica Burke is married to her high school sweetheart, and they have four children. The Burkes lived in Skopje, Macedonia, as missionaries for three years before moving to North Carolina where Jessica's husband is a chaplain at a local jail and a pastor. A former public school teacher, Jessica home educates her ... **[Read More \(https://erlc.com/multi\\_author/jessica-burke/\)](https://erlc.com/multi_author/jessica-burke/)**

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