

Covid Distance Learning Q&A--*Posted this in a parenting group I'm in yesterday. Some people asked me to share it publicly so they could share it*

****Usual disclaimer, I'm a school principal but I speak only for myself. Others may have different ideas****

I'm seeing a lot of threads online with the same general theme, so I wanted to just give a school's perspective on it all and answer some FAQs. Also, happy to answer any questions people have that I can answer.

Lots of people feeling stressed, overwhelmed and under pressure by the work being sent home for kids. I hope this can help with that somewhat.

Few points to note first:

1) This is not home schooling. This is an unprecedented emergency situation impacting the whole world. Let's keep perspective. Home schooling is a choice, where you considered, you plan for it and you are your child's schoolteacher in whatever form you choose. This is at best distance learning. In reality, it's everyone trying to separate their bums from their elbows because none of us know what we're doing and what's right and wrong here.

2) You are, and always have been, your child's primary educator. If you decide that your child isn't going to engage with anything sent home and is going to spend the entire period playing in the dirt, or baking, or watching TV, that is your choice. That is your right. It is clear in the constitution. There is nothing to stress or feel guilty about.

3) Schools don't know what they're doing either. They got no notice; no prep time and we're told 'continue to plan lessons as normal and just send them home' as if that is in any way possible. If it were, we'd all be out of a job very quickly. I won't rant about my thoughts on the Department on this but suffice it to say your school is winging it.

4) It is absolutely not possible to facilitate distance learning with a primary aged child and work from home at the same time. The very idea is nonsense. If you're trying to do that, stop now. You can certainly have activities where your child learns, but your focus is your job, and survival. Again, unprecedented. Stop trying to be superheroes.

So, a few FAQs:

- My school has sent home lots of physical work. Pages and pages, hours and hours. How am I supposed to get through it all?!

You're not, don't try. Your child's teacher spent a couple of hours in utter panic gathering things to send home so they could say they did their best and there weren't a lot of complaints that enough didn't go home. It's not a competition, or a race, it's unlikely the teacher will even manage to look at it all.

- My school keeps sending home links and emails with more work. How do I make it stop.
Ahhhhh...

See above. These are suggestions and ideas because the school is worried it'll be said they're not offering enough. Use them if they suit you, don't if they don't. If you're getting stressed, stop opening the emails. No one will know!

- X in my child's class has everything done and we've barely started. Will they fall behind?

Even if everything were equal in terms of support and time and number of kids etc (which it's not) kids learn at different rates. In the class there's a wide range of levels in all subjects, there's different paces and there are many kids working on differentiated level of work. It's almost impossible for teachers to differentiate at the moment, so you have to do it. By expectation and by time.

Your child will not fall behind. This is all revision and reminder work. If kids could learn new concepts without specific teaching, we wouldn't need teachers. They will cover all of this again, multiple times.

- I'm not doing any work with my kids. All their doing is Lego, cooking and playing outside.

All of this is learning. Very valuable learning. Give yourself and them a break.

- How can I get three different lots of work done with 3 different kids of different ages?

You can't, stop trying. If they're old enough, try to get them to do little bits independently. Otherwise try to do something they can all engage with, reading a story together, some free writing, baking etc.

- So what's the bare minimum you'd expect?

For me, survival mode. I won't pretend that may be true of all teachers, but you know what if they can't have perspective in a time like this then I wouldn't overly worry about their opinion anyway.

My ideal for my kids in our school?

- A bit of reading every day (independent or to them or via audiobook etc)
- some free writing now and then. If they'll keep a diary or something, great. If not, would they draw a comic?
- Practical hands-on maths. Be that via cooking, cleaning, outside or some maths games physical or digital.
- Some fine motor work. Lego, cutting, playdough, tidying up small toys.
- Physical exercise everyday
- Some art/music where possible through the week. Doesn't need to be guided.
- Stretch goal, if old enough getting them to independently work on a project is great for keeping brains ticking over. Get them researching in a book or online and putting together something to present to you or family.
- If younger, lots of imaginative free play, the more independent the better.

You are doing enough. You are loving your kids and supporting them through a difficult time. Look after yourself. Minimising stress is absolutely vital in a time like this for mental health. Don't let this be something that stresses you. Only you can control that by accepting it is in your circle of control, you are the primary educator, and this is all your call.