At the Google Children’s Centers, we recognize education to be one of the most precious rights and privileges in our society. For over 12 years, our mission has been to support young children and their working parents through our childcare centers in Silicon Valley. As our world navigates current events we see many families choosing or being asked to work from home. It is possible that schools and centers of learning may need to close their doors for a period time.

We want to uphold our commitment to children and to families through this time of uncertainty. In the spirit of collaboration and community, we offer these ideas and resources to you.

- Recommendations on Routines
- Thoughts on Healthy Habits
- Materials & Activities
  - for infants
  - for toddlers
  - for preschoolers
- Finding Joy in the World
- Talking About COVID-19
- Additional Resources from our Community

Google Children’s Centers

Our Mission

Embracing the wonder and power of childhood --
to grow young children,
to inspire the world.
Recommendations on Daily Routines

Your child’s day while you are working from home might flow differently from how it does during a typical school day -- and that’s ok! As much as possible:

- strive for consistency around sleeping and eating schedules
- connect with your teachers about a typical classroom schedule to see if you can keep any timing similar
- provide opportunities for different types of play: indoors, outdoors, independent, adult supported, time for movement, time for reflection, etc
- recognize that any type of transition can be stressful and plan accordingly (e.g. if you are handing off supervision to another adult, hold time on your calendar to support your child’s transition so you don’t feel the need to rush through it)
- some children benefit from having a visual schedule of the day; consider creating a visual map of the day and talk through this with your child so they know what to expect. This can be photos, drawings, or illustrations.
- adjust spaces in your home for your child to play and move about independently

Think about how you might include your child in household tasks and turn these into opportunities for engagement.

Every part of the day holds possibilities for learning! Depending on your child’s age and developmental level, they might enjoy helping with daily tasks such as putting away clean dishes, loading the washing machine, folding and sorting clean laundry, and prepping simple food. These are all natural learning opportunities for math, spatial awareness, fine motor, and gross motor development!

A nice way to keep the connection with school can be to print out (or look at on an electronic device) the photos of friends and school events. Children love to revisit past experiences and talk about them.
Healthy Habits

In addition to washing our hands, we want to continue to take care of ourselves with good food, too! Mealtimes offer opportunities for many activities. Slow down the meal process, so it’s not just about the eating.

**Involve children when preparing foods** for meals and snacks, washing fruit, mixing ingredients, setting the table, serving food, etc. Parents with infants can use mealtime to talk with their child as they prepare: notice the smells, the textures, and colors.

**Offer your child cookbooks or food magazines** to look through. This could be something you do any time of day. Maybe they can cut out or draw foods that they’d like to add to the grocery list!

**Pretend you are hosting a cooking show on YouTube.** Sportscasting the cooking process is a great opportunity to share cooking-related vocabulary and routines with even your youngest family members.

**Invite children to draw or write the menu** for the family meals. They could also write or draw instructions for recipes and email or mail them to friends and extended family.

**Ask children to create a special table setting or centerpiece.** Using materials from around the house, craft materials, or natural treasures you discover outdoors, make each meal extra special.

**Take it outside!** Consistency and routines are wonderful, but if your child is feeling a little restless from being inside for too long, have a picnic and enjoy snack/lunch outside or stay inside and have a picnic in the living room.

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“The Accessible Chef” has collections of visual recipes (images of ingredients, tools, and step-by-step instructions for cooking). They also have great visuals for washing hands and using hand sanitizer.

Prepare simple snacks ahead of time and make these available for your child to serve themselves as needed (on a low shelf in the fridge or in a special jar on a low table).

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The Google Children’s Centers

Individuals are agents of change.
Learning happens when we **develop and explore relationships with ideas, people, environments, and materials**. Here are some ideas for materials and activities for you to offer at home. Laying down a soft blanket and placing materials nearby creates a space where your infant can play independently (with supervision of course). This Janet Lansbury post gives guidance on finding a balance working alongside your baby. Throughout the week you can swap out materials to keep the space interesting and new.

**Things you might offer:**

- **Ribbons and rings** (wooden rings, jar lids, towel tubes, etc) Offer individually or together, play with putting ribbons through rings.

- **Tupperware** Play with stacking, nesting, putting things in and taking things out.

- **Tubes and Things that Roll** Pair cardboard tubes (or anything that could be a good ramp) with pom-poms or cars. Raise the ramps on a coffee table or low bench.

- **Metal Materials** Loose parts that produce sound offer an opportunity to figure out how objects work in connection with their actions. Try setting these materials on a floor that will support a loud sound when the metal materials fall on it. How does your child react to the sounds they are creating?

- **Crayons and Paper** Offer paper in different shapes, sizes, and texture to see how your child plays with it. Draw and make marks alongside them. Take time to notice and talk about what you are each making.

- **Water** Humans love water in all its forms! From a slowly dripping faucet to a water-filled tray - consider offering water in different ways and noticing the different means your child explores. Don’t forget about ice: you could freeze things like edible flower petals using an ice cube tray.

- **Printed Photographs** of family and friends, of your child, of school, of pets, of beautiful places, of artwork you love... You can have these loose or put in sheet protectors with tape to seal them and make the images more durable.

Lights can add an additional layer of complexity to any of these collections of materials. You can use twinkle lights, solar tea-lights, led balls (we think people use these at pool parties!) or other portable light sources to spice up any of these offerings.
• Materials & Activities for Toddler Children

Learning happens when we develop and explore relationships with ideas, people, environments, and materials. Here are some ideas for materials and activities for you to offer at home. Your toddler is at a point where their learning is very physical – they are using their whole body to play in the world. Set everyone up for success by creating a space indoors where they can move about (maybe push the furniture out of the way and put away that heirloom vase).

**Things you might offer**

**Things to Fill and Things to Empty** Fill a dish bin or bucket (with sand, water, pebbles, pinecones, etc) and use containers (spoons, measuring cups, bottle caps, empty yogurt cups, etc.) to scoop and pour. On a larger scale: look for baskets, bags, laundry bins, or boxes and pair with materials (rolled up socks? scarves? everything in your low kitchen cabinet?) that your child can transport around the house.

**Obstacle Courses** Encourage your child’s movement in your living room: use couch cushions or low stools to jump from, towels can become “pathways” on the rug. Get creative with things around your house to create simple and fun physical challenges.

**Fort-Making** A giant cardboard box, blankets, pillows, clips like you’d use to close potato chip bags etc. You can work with your child to set something up, which they can use as a cozy space all day.

**Little Animals and Natural Materials** Adding small animals (or people, or vehicles) to collections of sand, rocks, or leaves creates a stage for telling stories.

**Clay** If you find yourself with a batch of homemade playdough, keep it exciting by pairing it with stones, gems, animals, or bottle caps. Modeling clay is a nice alternative to playdough because it is oil-based so it doesn’t dry and crumble. It’s great for pinching apart and rolling into tiny pieces too.

**Cardboard tubes and cardboard boxes** Empty toilet paper rolls, paper towel rolls, and cardboard boxes (of all sizes) on their own can be fun. Pair them with a roll of masking tape for even more possibilities.

**Pretend Cooking** Everything you need for your child’s pretend kitchen is right there in your kitchen! Wooden spoons, mixing bowls, potholders, whisks -- I think that stuffed animal is looking a little hungry. Maybe she needs at cupcake?

When it seems like your child is “bored” or “done” with a toy or material, try rearranging things. By pairing materials together in new ways or offering them in new contexts, you might make them a whole new activity! For example, the same set of wooden blocks could be used one way with tiny plastic animals, another way with a bag or purse, another way with bottle caps and empty oatmeal containers, another way with empty picture frames… you get the idea!

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Google Children’s Centers
Develop and explore relationships with ideas, people, environments, and materials. Here are some ideas for materials and activities for you to offer at home. The internet has endless ideas for games, activities, audiobooks, videos, etc. We thought it would be most helpful to help you design spaces where children can independently create.

A space for “tinkering” and building. Challenge your child to invent something new. Choose a table or area of your home where it’s ok to get a little messy.

You will need:

**Things to make a plan:** paper (blank, ruled, grid), white board, markers, pens, paint, ruler and maybe some books or photographs to reference

**Things to attach stuff:** glue, wire, clear tape, washi tape, masking tape, duct tape, stapler, round head fasteners, twist ties, yarn

**Things to detach stuff:** scissors, pliers, mortar & pestle, hole puncher, single hole puncher

**Things:** tubes, straws, sticks (natural sticks, chopsticks, tongue depressors), magazines, cardboard, pompoms, corks, plastic bread tags...

Many of the things we use in our classroom are repurposed materials donated from families. [Playful Learning](#) has some good ideas of how to set these “loose parts” up as engaging activities

A space for creating and sharing stories. Invite your child to use multiple media to develop and share ideas. Bring in children’s books, non-fiction resources, audio-books, and videos to inspire their work.

You will need:

**Drawing & Writing Surfaces:** paper in different sizes, colors, thicknesses. Consider making blank booklets by folding 8.5x11 printer paper in half and stapling the long side

**Drawing and Writing Tools:** pens, markers, pencils, chalk, crayons, oil pastels

**Collage Materials:** Cut pictures from a magazine (or ask your child to do it) and paste onto a blank piece of paper. Ask your child to draw a story about the picture.

**Digital Tools:** cameras to document (or make stop motion movies), tablets to support, a portable projector for viewing images/video in new places

**Research Tools:** a standing mirror (could you draw a self portrait?), magnifying glasses, digital microscopes, rulers, measuring tapes

Artists, designers, and inventors all reflect on their work-in-progress as they are developing something. The process of looking back at past work can also inspire your child. Consider taking photos or saving sketches and “prototypes” of your child’s work and making these visible to them in their workspaces (on a bulletin board or in a binder). You can help them reflect by asking questions like: How did you make this? What worked? What didn’t work? Could you make this even [bigger/ smaller/ better/sillier/ etc.]*?
• Finding Joy in the World

Children offer us the gift of seeing the world through their eyes. Even though we’re being asked to work from home, we can still spend time outside in the world and bring the stories of our adventures with us when we return indoors.

What is there to find in your backyard, along the sidewalk by your home, at a neighborhood park, a local hiking trail...

Nature Search While on a walk, play a game of finding objects with letters/numbers, searching for bugs/birds, looking for things that are red or rainbow.

Collect Treasures Bring a small bag or basket with you to collect pebbles, sticks, leaves, and other treasures to bring home and use in your play

Collect Photographs Use your phone or digital camera to capture pictures of the things you find outside. Your child can get behind the lens too: we’ve found that even toddlers take amazing photographs!

Try a new lens Give yourself challenges to frame your adventures What do your toes see on a walk? What do birds see? What animals live in your neighborhood?

Storytelling Find opportunities for your child to create stories on the walk about the bugs and birds they see, dogs they meet, or where people are going.

Gardening Need help with weeding? Include your child(ren) with gardening or planting.

For more ideas check out: 100 Things to Do Outside with Your Child

Indoors and out: Engage in practices that support mindfulness and well-being. Children can move their bodies through yoga poses, practice intentional breathing, and express gratitude through words, drawings, and movement. Children at the GCC created this deck of Mindfulness Cards that your children may enjoy.
Talking with Your Child About COVID-19

“Coronavirus is germs. If you have the germs and you touch your face, it will get in your body.” - Luc & Zachary, age 4

No doubt, you’ve already Googled “how do I talk with my child about COVID-19.” There are many ideas and resources available to us (we’ll link to a few below). Every child is unique and it’s important that you do what feels best for you and your family. Consider talking with other people in your home (partners, older-siblings, family members, etc.) so that you can come to agreements about how you’ll support young children. Here are some suggestions:

Listen A big part of talking is listening. You can begin a conversation by listening to your child. What are they saying? What are they asking about? What stories are they telling in their play with dolls, animals, and friends? During times of uncertainty, one of the greatest comforts is having a friend who will listen and truly hear what you have to say. Understanding what your child’s ideas are will help you make a plan for how to respond.

Encourage Children to Say More Before jumping to respond with facts, an answer, or your own opinion, try repeating their idea or asking your child a question to better understand their ideas:

I hear you talking about germs.
Oh? Tell me more.
What made you think about that?

Be Honest & It’s ok to not know the answers Do your best to talk truthfully, in a developmentally appropriate way with your child. If your child asks you something, it’s ok to say you don’t know. Everyone has questions right now that don’t have answers yet.

What do you think?
We can look it up together!
Maybe we can ask... what their idea is.

Think about what you are saying, without words Your child knows you and will pick up on how you are feeling. Taking care of yourself during times of stress and uncertainty is ultimately a way of taking care of your child too.

What media is your child seeing and hearing? How often? And within what context? Think together as a family about the role tv, digital media, radio, magazines, photographs play in your lives and how that might impact your child.

Routines and Changes For all of us: familiar routines feel comfortable and change is hard. We can’t prevent all stress, but as much as possible we can try to keep routines consistent and offer extra time and patience when we know something is going to be different from usual. Familiarity can be found in daily routines, our favorite songs, our typical snacks, books and stories, treasured photographs, a huggable lovie. Keeping hold of these simple joys can help us get through challenges.

Look for the Helpers As Mr. Roger’s mom suggests, when things seem scary, always look for the helpers. You can frame some of your conversations this way too:

We want everyone to be safe. To help people stay healthy, we are staying home a little more.

Schools [museums, the library, etc] are helping us all stay safe by closing right now.

It can feel really disappointing and sad to miss special events, like birthday parties. I feel so proud of you and our family for doing our part to care for others and keep our community safe.
We draw inspiration from many progressive thought-leaders in education: the schools of Reggio Emilia Italy, the research of Harvard’s Project Zero, the advocacy of Ellen Hall and Boulder Journey School, to name only a few. Many of our friends in education have put forward resources to support families and children today. We are grateful to share links to these with you:

**Talking with Children**

- [How to Talk to Kids About Coronavirus (NYTimes)](https://www.nytimes.com)
- [Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus (Child Mind Institute)](https://www.childmind.org)
- [Coronavirus: What public health workers are telling their children (nbcNews)](https://www.nbcnews.com)
- [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies (CDC)](https://www.cdc.gov)
- [Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus (kqed)](https://www.kqed.org)

**Caring for Children While WFH**

- [Caring for Children During Extended Family Confinement](https://wwwCHILDRENW/CAREW/D/)
- [How Working Parents can Prepare for Coronavirus Closures (HBR)](https://www.hbr.org)
- [How to WFH Like a Boss (Washington Post)](https://www.washingtonpost.com)
- [TinkerLab: Activities for Infants - Elementary School](https://www.tinkermedia.org)
- [Covid-19: 5 Tips for When School is Closed (Play, Learn, Thrive)](https://www.playlearnthrive.org)
- [Activities from the Bay Area Discovery Museum](https://www.bayareadiscovery.org)

This resource was compiled by the Children’s Centers at Google to support our global community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you to the children who shared their ideas and drawings with us and the educators who listened and learned alongside them to make this resource possible.

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