



Reminders for parents about their elementary child

Be true and brief.

Just like their younger counterparts, elementary children need reassurance that adults are protecting them as best they can. Children certainly need the physical reassurance, but also psychological comfort. They need to feel safe and secure. Give elementary children the basic facts, the science about viruses. Explain what humans are doing to problem solve the situation (physical distancing, quarantine, testing, etc.). Information provides a sense that we *can do* things that help others and ourselves. If they want to know more, help them find online resources

- *Video: Children's Questions about Covid-19, Answers from medical professionals:*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=vSsKQPapS7A&feature=emb_logo

- *NPR Corona Comic for Kids*

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/07/811616161/kids-around-the-world-are-reading-nprs-coronavirus-comic>

and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=x2EiBzCnn8U&feature=emb_logo

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- *Talking with Children about Coronavirus*

Be careful of over-sharing but be willing to honestly answer all the children's questions.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

Contribute to Others

Elementary children want to help others. They are growing in their understanding and appreciation of how society works and how people work together to make communities function. They want to be a part of that too.

- *7 Ways to Help Others during Pandemic*

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/help-others-coronavirus>

- Write a letter, a poem, send a picture to someone who is living alone, or just lonely.
- Set up a food donation box at the grocery store (where parents are going anyway) – or set out a box on a nearby street corner (some people have transformed their tiny libraries to food donation stations). Get the word out on social media.
- Make a video of an older child reading a book for younger, non-readers to listen to.
- Paint cheery pictures and place them in the street-side windows of your home for passers-by.
- Play music on your porch/stoop/street for your neighbors.
- Send a “you're a hero” letter to necessary workers: garbage collectors, letter carriers, medical personnel, grocery store clerks, EMT/firefighters, police officers, air cargo personnel and truck drivers and barge workers who keep our supply chains operating, Amazon packers.
- Research and carry out more ideas!

Two Courses of Action

The two courses of action that follow: **Do Real Things** and **The Great Period at Home**, are not mutually exclusive. They come from a similar perspective. That perspective is simply to find what combination of activity works for your children and family. We want to help families in the ways that best work for them while continuing to support whole child development.

Whole child development means we aim to serve every child's intellectual capacity as well as their psychological, emotional/spiritual natures, moral, and physical beings. Humans are not workers, or scholars, or artists, or athletes (or...) all the time.

We are looking to create balance using our principles and practices. We understand children at different ages and stages (birth-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18-24) have different needs and characteristics but they all need age-appropriate versions of:

- Freedom (choice of activity) for the child coupled with responsibility (accountability) to self, others, their tools/resources, and their environments.
- Friendliness with Error: mistakes are natural and an opportunity to learn and grow into...
- Independence: elementary children are looking for intellectual independence (*Help me think for myself!*)
- The Human Tendencies for Life which are our innate urges to learn and grow: to Orient & Adapt, to make Order, to Explore & Discover, to Communicate, to Abstract & Imagine, to Become & Belong, to Repeat, to Perfect and be Exact
- Joy, Love, Optimism: We can do hard things and enjoy the process and thereby create conditions for a better future.

The Great Period at Home

"Great" has double and complementary meaning here.

The Great Period is "great" in the sense that it requires a **large** period of time. The three hours involved is not a randomly chosen number but based on scientific evidence first observed by Maria Montessori and more recently confirmed by brain researchers and developmental psychologists who have observed that children (and adults) actually need lengthy, uninterrupted periods of time to develop and practice concentration - which in turn is directly linked to learning.

The Great Period is also "great" in the sense that it is **grand**. It is a time where big ideas and the enormity of the child's imagination can be engaged. It is imposing and impressive to have 3 hours to fill with meaningful work. But, it takes time to build up the

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physical, mental, emotional and social stamina to do so in a balanced way. Children need the time and opportunity to master their best natures. The Great Period is meant to offer that time and opportunity.

The Great Period is punctuated with presentations or lessons of key materials and ideas by adult to individual and small groups of children who may then work independently with the materials.

- You are your children's first, and most influential teacher. You don't have to know everything or remember how to cross-multiply fractions to help children get started. They are very capable human beings.
- It's perfectly fine to feel frustrated – both you and your children! This is new. New things take time to become comfortable. How one handles their frustration has real impact. Breathe, walk away, come back (always come back). Adults need to be friendly with their own errors as well. It's great modeling for children. We're helping them develop a life-long self-care skill.
- A routine is important for children to feel secure and for the family to find a comfortable, workable structure to daily life. You can take a day off now and then without harming anyone!
- Work at home is not the same as the classroom. It won't look the same or feel the same. You have a different relationship with your children. Build on that strong, loving relationship. Work will follow.
- The Great Period is a 3-hour, scientifically based period of time where concentration is developed, and freedom of choice is practiced in balance with responsibilities. Help children get started. Give them just enough information to take off and let them go. Be available to answer questions. You can do your work near them in the same space. They are used to this in a Montessori classroom where there are lots of other children working around them. Interest will lag at times, that's natural (same for adults!)/ Gently re-direct children when interest flags. Suggest other activities if needed.

Getting Started

Set up a three-hour block of time – same time every day. Children work during this period.

Work includes lots of movement. They need to get up and retrieve things: a book from another room, a flower for dissection from the garden, to make themselves a cup of tea and snack, etc.

Talking is absolutely essential to elementary children because they are social beings. They think out loud. Children think differently than adults. They work differently too, so great latitude must be given for their need to communicate with others as this actually helps them process information.

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Discuss with the children what options are available for working on during this time. This is a little different than the way we do things in the classroom. They are adaptable. They just need to know the possibilities so they can make wise choices for themselves.

Ideas to Include in Great Period Work

Language & Art & Practical Life

- *Write*
Grocery lists / stories / all the nouns I can think of that start with " t" (or verbs or...) / non-fiction research / comics / make up a secret language and define some of the words / compose music / sing songs / write lyrics and poetry / keep track of work done.
- *Read*
Non-fiction: research information (books and online) / Fiction books / Read aloud (can be to you, another child, a friend online – they can read to each other, to the dog, the baby...) / Listen to an adult read – start a chapter book. Discuss it a *little*.
- *Speak*
Tell a family story / Make up a story as you go along (one person starts and then next person adds on) / Have a conversation about a specific topic / Share facts that are discovered / Have civil argument about a particular subject – then switch sides! / Read aloud / Say aloud, *I love you everyday* to everyone in the family /

Math and Geometry & Science

- Help your child make a little math journal with grid paper (can be printed from online) / work on the family meal budget for the week (use receipts to track expenses) / cook or bake following a recipe – convert fractions from common to decimal fractions / find the perimeter and area of a bedroom – compare to other rooms in the house /
- Make and use an observation journal for the changing season (botany, zoology, natural history) / track the weather, tides, moon phases, precipitation, wind speed, the advance of daylight each day and graph information / build a simple weather station / gravity experiments / inertia, centrifugal, centripetal force experiments / identify & draw leaf margins / identify & draw flowers / identify birds by song, sight – list / identify trees by their bark / collect specimens (shells, flowers, leaves, stones) and organize them / paint specimens /make a plant press and save some specimens / look at the parts of leaves, flowers, etc. Same can be done by looking at animals in the neighborhood.

Media

- Children like to work together and think together and do together.
- Children may use Skype or WhatsApp to talk with other children over shared

projects. They can pick a research topic, plan who is doing what, discuss resources, share ideas, and set up a time to meet again to discuss progress. They can invite a group to view a final sharing of the work. (Not everything needs to be shared – sometimes the work is satisfaction enough.)

Invent, Create

- Equally valid to other work is music, art, invention. Children need these areas to be developed as well and will learn a great deal about math, language, and science by doing so. Give time to music practice, drawing, painting, drawing, knitting, crafting, building things, expressing one's self.

Movement

- To promote learning - add movement. Study after study shows that physical activity activates the brain, improves cognitive function, and is correlated with improved academic performance. AND, it's fun! Taking in information using more than one sense encodes it in one's long-term memory
- Children need to move their hands to learn. Pencil and paper is not enough. Use found objects around the home to help demonstrate ideas: buttons, bean bags, hacky sacks, dried beans, coins, stones, shells, colored pencils to demarcate different categories, hula hoops, balls, etc. Jump in place or toss bean bags to work on times tables, use repetitive hand gestures to demonstrate ideas, sing a song with movement about a concept you are trying to learn (YouTube is an enormous help for this).
- Get some time outdoors every day. This doesn't necessarily happen during the Great Period. Since playmates may be sadly lacking, play with your child. It will be hard for you – but give it time. Ask your children to teach you a favorite ball game or build a fort together or walk the dog together or run as fast as you can around the block. Climb trees. Controlled movement activities: Yoga! Tai-Chi.
- Elementary children have an enormous capacity for movement and an enormous stamina. They need more physical activities if they are not really bone-tired at the end of the day.

Care and Respect for Others and Self

- This is as important, may be more so than ever. Handwashing, breathing when stressed, meditation, washing one's self, washing the dog, family chores, compassion and forgiveness when things go wrong, family storytelling ...all contribute to a healthy self and family.

The Care and Respect Ritual

Everyday, do something to demonstrate care (kindness) and respect for yourself.

Everyday, do something to demonstrate care (kindness) and respect for others.

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Everyday, do something to demonstrate care (kindness) and respect for the home and outdoor environment.

Everyday, do something to demonstrate care (kindness) and respect for the tools and resources you are using everyday.

At the end of the day have a family conversation where children and adults alike, answer these questions with each other:

What is something new I taught myself today/learned?

What is something I did to help the family?

What is something I did to demonstrate I care about myself?

What is something I did to help or think about those outside my family?

What am I grateful for?

Do Real Things

Do real things.

My advice: Do not try to recreate the classroom at home.

School is a laboratory where certain kinds of real things happen. It is set up in a very particular way with very particular participants designed for particular outcomes. It is unique, special, rather lovely when done well and perhaps impossible to replicate.

The home laboratory is something entirely unique and special and rather lovely in it's own right – and impossible to replicate anywhere else. Different kinds of real things are done at home. Value and appreciate the opportunity to be home and do some real things.

Children who do real things - in collaboration with others - learn real skills and grow up to be independent humans who know how to cooperate and collaborate and contribute to society.

Certainly, home provides an opportunity to build on the school experience – and there are thousands of websites and ideas out there for doing so - but now is a special a time where family experiences can be valued and appreciated in an entirely expansive and beautiful way.

Because parents and children have unexpected time together and there is no need or call to rush anywhere, we can embrace this once in a lifetime event and *be together*; and, for once, there is *enough time*. You may ask, *Enough time for what?*

Well there is enough time ...

To work together

Spring clean! There are many practical life activities to learn and do: making beds, washing and folding laundry (teach children how to use the washing machine and dish washer), plan dinner and breakfast menus, dust, learn how to make beds, vacuum & sweep floors, clean bathrooms, organize the cupboards, wash dishes, dry and put away, disinfect door knobs, mailboxes, common surfaces. Clean the car, the garage, the boat, the refrigerator. Cut and stack wood. Sweep the driveway. Rake the yard. Get garden beds ready. Plant garden starts indoors. Observe and admire your work.

To play together

You may be amazed what can be learned about money, resource management, justice, logic, problem solving, reading, math, democracy...but especially what can be learned about each other by playing games. Play board games and the old childhood games that are disappearing: Hide 'n Seek, Sardines, 4 square, Tag games, Kick the Can, Capture the Flag, Hop Scotch, Jump Rope & Double Dutch, Jacks, Marbles, Mother May I, Red Light/Green Light, Spud, Cat's Cradle, Musical Chairs, Hot & Cold, Battleship, Tic-tac-toe, Slap Hands, Catch, Blind Man's Bluff, Marco Polo... Observe and relish your play.

To move together

Go for a run, a ski, a bike ride, a kayak/boat ride. Walk the dog. Build a fort or secret land. Enjoy the change in seasons, watch and listen to the returning birds, observe (smell) black cottonwood trees leafing out, take weather readings and predict the weather, move your bodies, walk with your breath. (NB: 'phenology' is the scientific study of seasonal change). Observe and remember your adventures.

To cook and dine together

You'll do a lot more eating together than maybe anytime since your children were babies. Show them how to cook your favorite dishes (maybe something your parents made). And show the children how to set a proper table, how to have a conversation over a meal, how to serve tea, work on manners (grace and courtesy). Try to eat two meals a day together as a family. Starting and ending the day around the family table is a gift of talk and time. Observe and appreciate your food and family time.

To sing and make music together

If you don't play an instrument, listen to your children practice their instruments. Sing a lullaby you sang to them when they were infants. Make a family song book and illustrate it. Listen to favorite artists and talk about what you like about

their music (not their 'image' but their music). Singing together is a powerful way to build up the family structure – and by the way if only the prettiest birds sang – the forest would be silent. Where would our forests be without ravens and eagles and Stellar's jays squawking across our mountains and valleys? There is beauty in the effort together. Observe and enjoy your music.

To make stuff, make art together

Be crafty, construct stuff from wood scraps, Legos, felt and yarn bits. Play dolls. Get out the glue and tape and papers and cloth. Sew, knit, crochet, make Origami, paint, compose music, write stories, make puppets, write a puppet play (or any play), perform a reader's theatre after building the sets. Dance. Invent stuff. Practice the scientific method. Find the area of a room, the house, the yard, the street. Draw a map... Observe and admire your creativity.

To be quiet together

Make quiet. A small silent time everyday resets things, brings the family in balance.

Being quiet together is a powerful model for being still with one's own thoughts. Reading, daydreaming, drawing...there are lots of ways to be quiet – but it is so dramatically powerful to value quiet and make it together. Observe and take delight in the peace.

To have fun together

Make laughter. It will be remembered best and most of all.

Read a funny story aloud. Tell jokes, tell stories about each other (and childhood stories), call grandma or grandpa and have them tell stories about their childhood (or your parents), forgive mistakes and laugh them off, chuckle at your inventions, creations, music...Observe yourselves and take yourselves lightly.

Think and play and move and work and create and laugh together.

This is a time to connect, not correct.

Have compassion for one another in this new time.

Everyone is generally doing the best they can under the most unusual circumstances.

Be together. There is enough time.

Do real things.