

# Parents = the Difference

**\*\*News Flash — Number 6\*\***

The time has come to retire the negative connotation of quarantine and start thinking of the home as a “sanctuary”. It may only be a matter of semantics, but knowing school will be virtual for the remainder of the school year, it is time to try and reset our thinking. But how do we transform home into a sanctuary? The first step is evaluating what is and isn’t working. A few lucky households have figured it out, but for many tensions remain high and tempers short. This Newsflash addresses some of the daily struggles you have shared with me. It is my hope you find something in this issue that helps you see your home as a place of refuge and safety.

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## Fighting Screen Time Battles

Long before COVID-19 parents expressed concern about children’s overuse of digital devices. We see the effects in the classroom everyday. Due to an overreliance on tablets and phones, there are children entering PK without knowing how to play. It is not surprising these children have trouble socially.

Knowing how to play is essential to social development. Play progresses through linear stages. A toddler engages in ‘*spectator play*’ by watching other children on the playground. Next comes ‘*solitary play*’ where a child plays contentedly by themselves. In ‘*parallel play*’ children play side by side with the same toys, but not with each other. By 4 years of age children engage in ‘*cooperative play*’. They play with one another, build off each other’s ideas and create stories together. Children who rely too heavily on tech often get stuck in the solitary play stage which is typically seen in young three year-olds. Given our current situation, it is natural to wonder how our reliance on technology will affect our children’s development.

One thing we know is children get wound up with too much screen time. A young child’s body screams to move. I don’t have to tell you how hard it is to walk down the street when your child’s only purpose in life is to run! The challenge is creating opportunities for your child to move. You have been bombarded with information from teachers and myself about big body movement activities. The volume of material has been overwhelming, but know our intentions are good. Trust me when I say everyone will be happier if you incorporate movement into the day.

Another way to lure children away from screens is to create opportunities for play with open-ended materials. These materials do not prescribe a certain type of play or

outcome. Think about the toys you enjoyed as a child. My guess is they were open-ended toys like Cabbage Patch Dolls, Star Wars figures, Care Bears, Matchbox cars, My Little Pony, and Fischer Price Little People Sets. These toys tap into imagination.

What has become popular as of late is something called “loose parts” play. Loose parts consist of random items collected for play. They can be natural or synthetic and should inspire a child’s imagination. Think of items like rocks, miniature figures, twigs, paper tubes, rubber bands, wine corks, straws, etc. These are items you already have at the home. Gather them in a box and model how to play with them. This will require you stepping back into your childhood to find the magic. If you are lucky enough to have a backyard, your child can gather his or her own loose parts. <http://bk-media.vhost.psu.edu/documents/tips1107.pdf>

Another way to pull your child away from screens is to make playdough. The sensual experience of creating and making outweighs the mess it is bound to make. How about a dress up box? Gather hats, shoes, ties, and other clothing in a box. This is basically the classroom’s dramatic play center (always one of the most popular choices). Create a store with empty food boxes, cans, bags, etc. Got play money? Now you’ve got a store! (No play money? Make it. Haven’t you always wanted to print your own money?)

In our current climate, we need to be mindful about defining both time and place for technology use. We can’t live without screens at the moment. When you do click the mouse (outside of classroom meetings) think commercial-free programming like educational programs about animals, or tours of famous places and museums. By the way, you’re doing a great job!

<https://screentimeneetwork.org/>



# 5 Ways to Gain Control

Going into week six of isolation, it is possible you may be losing your cool with your child(ren) more often. Why wouldn't you? The challenge of surviving has been mastered, and now we are settling into day-to-day stuff. How do we make this work? How do we keep our sanity? How can we foster our child's continued healthy growth?

Here are 5 ideas that may help:

1. You have heard it over and over, but routine is your friend. Young children mark time by what comes next. If your day is willy-nilly your children will be too. Get them out of bed at a set time. Sit down, have breakfast and get them dressed. It is just too easy to stay in pajamas all day if you're not going anywhere. Routine doesn't mean you have to schedule every minute, but kids do better if they know what is expected and what comes next.
2. If you are working from home, you will be a happier parent if you can adjust and lower your workload. Split time between job requirements and connecting with your children. Young children cannot be expected to entertain themselves for long periods of time. They require connection. I know of no other way to connect than by spending time with them.
3. There are real feelings behind your child's outbursts. They are displaying their feelings the only way they know how (and it isn't always pretty). Big feelings are a time for compassion and empathy. Instead of reacting with frustration or irritation, take a step back and look at what's going on for your child. Helping your child calm down will build communication and connection. Remember this is a confusing time for them.
4. If you are a working parent, you may have felt twinges of guilt about not being able to spend more time with your child. Quarantine has thrown you into fulltime parenthood. If you feel this is your chance, be careful about trying to do everything. Yes, parents are superheroes, but our super powers are limited. After all, Spiderman can't see through solid objects and Superman can't spin webs. Whenever possible divide the job of supervising the children. Don't be afraid to ask family members for help.
5. So what do you do when you are supervising the children? PLAY! Get down on the floor and enter their world of make-believe. When you do this, you give your child the message that 'everything is going to be all right.'

We can turn this tense time into one of growth by communicating and connecting. Trust the power of routine, manage your expectations, lean into your compassion and empathy, divide the workload, and play with your children. At the end of the day, everyone will feel happier and safe.

*(based on a webinar by Jackie Flynn, RPT)*

# Ways to Play With Your Child

Adult play often looks different than child's play. Think about the ways you play. Some of us use intellectual skills to play and do crosswords puzzles, follow sports teams, knit or use language to tell jokes. Others prefer to play with their bodies by working out, doing yoga or participating in team sports. Adult play has a lot to do with demonstrating mastery. Children also play to gain mastery, but they use it to understand things too. They play to learn how their body works? What feels good? What doesn't? What will happen when they are bigger? What will happen tomorrow?

The disconnect that sometimes happens between adults and children when they play together is adults tend to use the left side of their brains (thinking) and children use the right (feeling). Adults reach for a goal, a purpose, an outcome. Children engage in the experience and embrace trial and error. An example of playing with Legos illustrates the difference. Legos makes big money manufacturing kits that result in a finished predetermined product that matches the picture on the box. Young children are less interested in the tediousness of fitting part A to part B and much more interested in putting pieces together to see what they can create from their imagination.

Some parents become bored when they play with their children. I would like to suggest three strategies to keep you engaged.

1. Use play as an opportunity to teach. Here is a great (albeit lengthy) video about using Legos creatively. <https://www.facebook.com/LEGODUPLO/videos/2190622357821482/>
2. Build on your child's play. Let him or her take the lead and add your ideas along the way. Here is another video on parents' response to children's request to play. <https://www.facebook.com/LADbible/videos/2285551588415126/>
3. And for the brave of heart, follow your child's lead and let them take you on an play adventure! This is the type of play that opens a window into their thinking, point of view and feelings. Notice what are they doing. What narrative are they spinning? What feelings they express? Like the old game of Follow the Leader or Simon Says, do what the child does and repeat or rephrase what they say. **Do not ask questions.** Just watch, listen and acknowledge what they say.