

# How to plan family quality time during a pandemic

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WACO—With schools closed and many parents working remotely to halt the spread of COVID-19, families can incorporate a variety of activities to keep kids engaged and ready to continue learning when they return to school, family experts at Baylor University noted.

“Life will look a little different over the next few weeks” amid the social distancing recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Karen K. Melton, assistant professor of child and family studies in Baylor’s Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences.

“For the next few weeks, we are going to get to spend extra quality time with our loved ones at home, likely resulting in more laughs and tears. A sense of routine can help us stay calm and keep moving forward.”

## How to be intentional about family time

Families can make the time better by focusing intentionally on three factors: schedules, screen time and social connectedness.

### Schedules

Schedules can take time and effort to create, but once established, they will help reduce stress, Melton said.

“You can create a full-day schedule or just a morning/afternoon schedule

when you need to get other work done. By providing a family's schedule, you will reduce boredom and anxiety while increasing a sense of belonging and competency. Some families may allow kids to watch TV in the morning and then work through their schedule. If they complete all their activities, then they can earn additional screen time in the late afternoon."

**Some schedule suggestions:**

- Art and/or music
- Outdoor play
- Free play
- Learning activities/educational worksheets
- Reading
- Chores
- Board games
- Screen time

## **Screen time**

"Your kids will likely have more screen time than usual," Melton said. "For older children, limit screen time so that it does not replace physical activity, sleep or other healthy behaviors. Parents also may want to consider that all screen time is not equal, not only by the ways we interact — smartphones, tablets, computers, gaming devices and televisions — but by different categories for screen time use."

**Among those:**

- Watching educational shows versus watching entertaining shows
- Playing educational games versus playing entertainment games
- Constructive social media versus destructive social media use

# Social connectedness

Apps and other technology offer ways to stay connected with those outside the home. But each day of the week also provides opportunities for meaningful moments with family at home, said Nicole McAninch, clinical associate professor of child and family studies, who co-directs the Intentional Family Project at Baylor.

## **Some ideas:**

- Dust off the board games.
- Teach your kids a family recipe.
- Have a family dance party.
- Play a video game as a family.
- Have a family movie night.

“Life will be a little crazier than usual over the next few weeks,” Melton said. “Remember, we are all in this together. We will all need to sacrifice and be more flexible. If we spend a little time being intentional with schedules, screen time and social connections, then we can look back at this time, having created meaningful moments that help our family thrive.”