

# KEEPING YOUR CHILD BUSY DURING THE SCHOOL CLOSURE



A lot of people are understandably feeling pretty anxious about what's going on with the coronavirus.

There's a lot of fear about getting sick or what might happen if the virus becomes so widespread that our infrastructures can't handle it. There's panic about having enough food and supplies in case things get really bad. There's a loss of trust in many of our governmental institutions. And there's just a lot of uncertainty about how it's all going to play out in the coming weeks and months.

Things are scary and serious, no doubt about it. But if we're going to get through this well, we need to keep our heads. And that means not adding any unnecessary or unhelpful anxiety on top of an already scary and stressful situation.

The Coronavirus pandemic isn't just changing how we live; it's also changing how we learn. Over 300 million students worldwide are currently not attending school due to quarantines, and that number is expected to increase over the coming weeks, as more countries and cities shut schools indefinitely. Many colleges and universities canceled in-person classes for the remainder of the semester, switching to online instruction. Some public schools have moved to virtual schooling in the wake of closures, with instruction happening over videoconference and worksheets moving to Google Docs.

Fortunately, there are numerous online learning resources that families can take advantage of, including many that are free. Some of these resources have paid or premium options if you choose, but even the free versions offer great features and functionality. There are also many low-cost online learning resources, such as ***Outschool***, that are worth exploring.

As parents prepare to spend time at home with their children for the foreseeable future, these digital tools can be great for kids and help the whole family to learn together:

***Khan Academy*** – Perhaps the leader in free, high-quality, online learning content for kids, Khan Academy offers no-cost YouTube instructional videos in a wide range of content areas, including all levels of mathematics, English language arts, science, history, computer science and programming, and SAT preparation. Content is aligned with state curriculum standards, and

parents can view and track their children's progress. Khan Academy is widely used in schools across the country and can be a great resource for in-home learning.

**Prodigy Math** – Also used by many school districts, Prodigy is a free, online math program that uses a fun video game-style interface to engage learners. Users create their characters and conquer challenges while doing math along the way, tied to their skill level and aligned with core competencies. The paid version offers more math and allows parents and teachers (parents can register as teachers), to run tests and diagnostics, emphasize certain mathematical concepts, and assess progress behind the scenes, while the learners happily play the game.

**Duolingo** – If you or your child are interested in learning a foreign language, Duolingo offers free online learning tools in 36 languages.

**No Red Ink** – This free, online writing and grammar resource helps learners of all ages to practice and refine their writing skills. Sign up as a teacher (you can use your home as a school), create a learner profile for your child, and then allow your child to log in to the student account and get practicing.

**Mystery Science** – Mystery Science is offering free memberships for up to one year, with engaging lessons in a variety of science-related areas, including timely topics such as, “How do germs get inside your body?” Video lessons are complemented by hands-on experiments and downloadable activities.

**Codecademy** – This could be a great time for young people to learn in-demand skills like coding in different programming languages, web development, design, and data science. Codecademy offers free access to basic lessons, with the option to pay for more advanced courses if your kids get really into it.

The dynamic, self-paced introductory economics courses offered for free through Marginal Revolution University are likely to pique your older child's interest. These are also great classes for you to learn alongside your child.

**Lynda.com** –Lynda.com has an array of online learning resources in subject areas ranging from photography to business to web development.

**TED-Ed** offers a free suite of high-quality videos on a variety of topics for learners of all ages, including supplemental materials, discussion questions, and opportunities to probe deeper into areas of interest. Register as an educator and you can help to customize your child's learning experience, or let your child explore independently.

Smithsonian Institution – Many museums, including the Smithsonian Institution and especially its open access Learning Lab, offer free, online resources and activities for learners. Check out the websites of your favorite museums to see what free, digital education tools are available.

**Open Culture** – Access 1,500 free, online audio and video courses from top universities, as well as 1,000 free audio books.

**Edx** offers access to free online courses delivered by a consortium of leading colleges and universities. Learn college-level content in computer science, engineering, and robotics, among others. Similar to **Edx**, **Coursera** also provides a wide range of courses created by various colleges and universities, including many that are free.

**Academic Earth** – View hours of free lectures and course materials from leading universities.

**Alison:** Offering a range of free online courses in all subjects, Alison’s trending course is all about the coronavirus.

**Don’t forget about Offline learning as well**

Online learning resources can be incredibly valuable, particularly now when our in-person interaction may be limited and our daily routines are disrupted. But don’t underestimate the enduring power of offline, emergent learning. The coronavirus pandemic offers an opportunity to step back, slow down, and gather together as a family. Parents may understandably feel pressure to maintain their children’s schoolwork for fear that they will fall behind, but a few weeks of “deschooling,” or unwinding from the rigidity and regimentation of school, can be beneficial and may unlock new curiosities, interests, and talents in your children. Allow for abundant unscheduled time and lots of opportunities for play. Get immersed in board games and card games as a family, read a book out loud for all to enjoy, linger over breakfast, go for a walk. While today’s digital tools help to keep us all connected and engaged during this uncertain time, let’s also use this historic moment to reconnect with our children in other ways as well.