

Quality time, structure important for families during COVID-19 pandemic

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One of the many challenges facing families due to the COVID-19 pandemic is finding new ways of living together while letting go of old expectations.

Brock University Associate Professor of Sport Management Dawn Trussell says one solution is to set a structured schedule and rethink recreation and sport.

"There is an important opportunity to strengthen familial bonds and create a sense of unity," says Trussell. "Research shows us that families need a sense of familiarity and stability in their lives; these experiences can foster feelings of family closeness."

Trussell recommends planning a consistent hour or two every day that all family members can look forward to. She suggests the time being low-cost, home-based [leisure activities](#) that align with individual interests and require little planning, such as board games, a game of soccer in the yard or reading together.

Earlier this week, the Ontario government announced it was extending the provincial state of emergency for at least another two weeks. The new order closed all outdoor recreational amenities and public facilities, such as sports fields, playgrounds and parks. Additionally, schools across the province are now closed until at least May 4, though that could be extended further.

"For parents in particular, creating a consistent strategy is essential as children look for structure," says Trussell. "Families are a primary source of companionship and gratification. Now more than ever, families are the primary pillar of support as people are instructed to 'go home and stay home.'"

Amid growing pandemic fears and restrictions, Trussell affirms when families spend quality 'play' time together, it can build and strengthen the family unit which, in turn, may alleviate stress.

She also notes that too much time together isn't necessarily ideal,

especially for parents working from home full-time or essential workers who still must leave their house for work.

She urges parents to practise [self-care](#), as research suggests that parents, especially mothers, often sacrifice their own leisure in support of their children.

"Rather than thinking you have to be together all the time, recognize that short, scheduled moments in a day are more meaningful for everyone," says Trussell, a family of two elementary school-aged daughters.

"Prioritizing and scheduling even a short amount of time for yourself will help you navigate this difficult time and contribute to the collective well-being of the [family](#) unit."

For families on the COVID-19 frontline or who are just seeing their children through a [video camera](#), Trussell emphasizes this consistent time of scheduled connection may provide an important sense of togetherness, even if online.

"The COVID-19 restrictions can still provide us with the opportunity to reconnect and strengthen our relationships and communication among [family members](#) through emails, letters, phone calls and social media," she says.

Provided by Brock University

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