

Stress management: 6 lessons parents can take from pandemic homeschooling

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Now that children in the UK are back to school, parents have the opportunity to reflect on what can be learned from [lockdown homeschooling](#). Or as some rightly took to calling it, [crisis schooling](#).

[New research](#) we have conducted examines parents' experiences of homeschooling—and what made their stress better or worse—during the first lockdown in England.

A total of 323 parents completed a quantitative online survey between May 1 and July 24 2020. We found that although most parents reported feeling stressed, some had used [effective](#) coping mechanisms, which improved their wellbeing. Those who were the most stressed reported not enjoying homeschooling their [children](#) and felt insecure about how to do it.

Despite how extraordinary the circumstances of the past year have felt, the stresses associated with them are not uncommon, nor is that feeling of insecurity in not knowing how to overcome them. Here are six practical tips our findings back up, that could prove helpful for parents in the future.

Plan ahead

Prep and planning was one of the positive coping mechanisms parents responding to [our survey](#) reported as having helped during lockdown schooling. This chimes with much of the [media advice](#) for harried parents suddenly expected to become teachers during that time.

Research shows that planning ahead can help everyone [feel in control](#) and gain a much needed sense of security during difficult patches. It helps avoid—as much as possible—the unexpected events that may create additional [stress](#).

There will always be aspects of our lives that we cannot control. In that sense, families may find it useful, beyond the pandemic, to plan their week ahead on Sundays. Make sure that each member of the family knows what is going on. Check that the children have everything they

need for school and they are aware of their activities for the week.

Think creatively

In [our study](#), parents who considered themselves creative reported feeling less stressed and better able to support their children's homeschooling needs. We tend to think of [creative people](#) as being good at arts, but [creativity](#) is also about finding solutions to everyday problems.

Educators encouraged parents grappling with homeschooling for the first time to find alternative ways use their home spaces or to [make room for fun](#). These were examples of creative thinking.

Try to harness a similar approach to parental problem solving in general. Ask yourself what is under your control. What can you do differently? What resources do I have?

Learn through reflection

[We found](#) that parents who engaged in positive reflection reported feeling less stressed when homeschooling their children. Research bears this out: there are lessons to be learned from any situation, sometimes even more so from [negative ones](#).

During lockdown, educators emphasized that it was important for parents to [stay flexible](#) in their approach to home learning. Reflecting on your experiences could prove valuable. What works and what doesn't? When things go back to normal, what would you like to change and what would you like to keep?

Similarly, come the weekend, you might find it useful, as a family, to

reflect about your experiences of the week and what can be learned from them. Doing so will help the children to get to [know themselves better](#) and [bring the family together](#).

Think about discipline

Some parents who participated in our study who were very stressed during lockdown [reported disciplining](#) their children more harshly and more frequently than those who were less stressed. Another [study](#) conducted in Germany asked 562 parents to write a 21-day journal during the 2020 lockdown and found that in general, school closures had a [negative impact](#) in parent-child relations. Relations were worse both when children were doing schoolwork every day and when they weren't doing any at all. This suggests that as tricky as it was to find a balance between work and fun, it was nonetheless helpful in keeping the relationship healthy.

We know that when parents are stressed, they tend to behave in a more authoritarian manner and use harsher discipline techniques—sometimes [even corporal punishment](#). This happens because when we are stressed we are more likely to have trouble controlling our negative emotions and lose patience.

So whenever you are going through a rough patch, try to reflect on how you are disciplining your children, and what that may tell you about yourself at that particular time. In terms of addressing wrong behavior, try to explain it to your children, and together, think about how to behave next time. This is what we call [inductive discipline](#). When repeated consistently, it tends to be more effective than punitive discipline.

Look ahead

Parents who engaged in what we call catastrophising—who ruminated over how terrible homeschooling was and how endless it seemed—reported feeling more stressed when home-schooling their children than those who could [put things into perspective](#).

In difficult situations, especially those we cannot control, it is quite easy to fall into the trap of not seeing the end of it—another example of an ineffective coping mechanism. It is important to keep reminding ourselves—and our children—that it will end. This helps everyone feel more positive and more in control.

Take care of yourself

Finally, [we found](#) that those parents who were very stressed, coped worse with the demands of homeschooling than those who weren't. This is probably the most basic rule of parenting but one we often forget. We can only look after others if we are [feeling well and strong](#).

As psychologists pointed out when [lockdown learning began](#), in order to cope with the demands of being a homeschooling parent, it was important to find ways of [dealing](#) with our own stresses.

This always applies. Dedicate time each day to yourself, even if it is only 30 minutes. Go for a walk, have a bath, talk to a friend, have a quick nap—some activity that will [improve your wellbeing](#).

Children learn by observing [parents](#)—it is what we call [modeling](#)). So let us lead by example and take stock of what can be learned from the experience of [homeschooling](#) during the pandemic. We can teach children to use positive coping mechanisms, to face problems in a creative manner, and to face the future with optimism. By doing so, we will be giving them the tools to face other problems life may throw at them.

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