

# **‘Education via Computer Needs To Be Limited’: Psychologist Says Parents Must Step Up To Nurture Kids In Age Of Coronavirus**

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With schools closed for more than 55 million children across the country in an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus, students, parents and teachers are facing a host of new and unexpected challenges.

Schools all over the country have created virtual classrooms online, but many parents and caregivers find themselves managing the workload and tools like Google docs and Zoom meetings — all in addition to working remotely, taking care of finances and putting food on the table.

But in this difficult situation, it’s more important for parents to maintain positive relationships than to worry about getting all of this done perfectly, says [Melanie Killen](#), Ph.D., a developmental psychologist and Professor of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, and Professor of Psychology (Affiliate) at the University of Maryland.

Killen discussed her thoughts and concerns with CBS Local on Wednesday:

**CBS Local:** This is obviously an unprecedented period of time for parents. What’s happening now is something likely most moms and dads never prepared for nor even thought about. What are your biggest concerns for families moving forward? Will families benefit from this experience in the long run?

**Melanie Killen:** Parents and family members are being asked to help their children learn material in an entirely new medium during the regular workday, and in many cases while they are working from home. There were no training workshops for how to do it; no in-person workshops. Everyone is doing this on a crash course basis with little to no preparation. What I have heard many times over is the newly-recognized appreciation that parents have for teachers, and the amazing job that they do each day (“more pay for teachers!”).

**CBS :** Parents are facing enough stress just from working remotely to taking care of finances to keeping the pantry filled right now — but adding homeschooling and being on parent duty during hours they usually aren’t adds an even greater layer. How important is it for moms and dads to be present for their kids right now and nurture their emotions and needs?

**MK:** It’s always important for parents to nurture children’s emotions and needs. The extent to which parents have to be present in the room while children do online school work depends a lot on the age and grade level of the child. Younger children need more presence, and older children and adolescents are fine with more autonomy and independence. However, what’s very clear is that parents are recognizing first hand that school is much more than teaching academic subjects. It’s a phenomenally important socializing environment.

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**CBS :** Children are used to recess and physical education to break up their days. They are used to socializing with their peers constantly. What are the consequences of these losses if parents aren't tending to their child's need for exercise and socialization?

**MK:** This is a major concern during the shut-down. Children's needs for peer interaction, peer play, and exercise are important for their healthy social and academic development. Parents need to play with their children, too, to reduce stress. Math can be a game like bingo. Be sure to allow your child to have fun, and enjoy time together. The long-term consequences all depend on how long the shut-down lasts. If the shut-down is one month then the time lost for both academic and peer interaction can be made up. Hopefully, the virus will be contained by early summer.

**CBS :** What are the most important tools or tips parents can employ to better serve their kids for this indefinite period of time?

**MK:** School-based lessons are difficult even for the most professional teachers. There is no "perfect" here. Online schooling is one big experiment that the school systems developed for this extremely rare societal-level shut-down. The schools have been amazingly courageous to take this on. A few tips:

1. Start with a schedule. Children like routines that are well explained and consistent.
2. Have a schedule that is both varied and flexible. Build in breaks, and time to stretch.
3. Have a range of activities for each lesson.
4. Talk through each lesson plan and take time to have a conversation and discussion about the goals.
5. Remind your children that you are new at this and you are doing your best to teach them but it won't be the same way that their school teacher does it.
6. Recognize that young children need more breaks than older children.
7. Instead of video games for breaks, encourage children to exercise (jumping jacks), have a snack, or do a puzzle to give their eyes (and minds) a break from screens.
8. Find tips from other parents online, and build a community. Share your experiences with other parents to exchange ideas and acquire strategies for enjoying the day with your child.