

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Parents You Are Doing A Great Job: Give Yourselves a Hand, and a Break

Parents, you are doing an amazing job, and the Brain Health Initiative knows how hard it is. As parents, we all have experienced the never-ending struggle of balancing home and work life. Now we have added safer-at-home to the mix, further blurring the boundaries of work, school and home. Just how are we supposed to cope?

First, give yourself a hand for learning to deal with all these new challenges. School has been closed since mid-March and online learning has taken its place. Since April 3, if not before, most of us are now working at home. True, this has created many challenges. But it has also created opportunities for being together as a family. Congratulations for making it all work!

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

[Watch this video](#) from Sesame Street, a safe place for all of us-young and younger! Elmo's dad, Louie, wants to remind you to take a moment for yourself.

Here are some brain healthy strategies for parents working at home with children.

- 1. Manage expectations.** Make sure your employer understands your children are at home so they are aware your work (or work calls) may not be interruption-free. Explain to your kids that working from home may seem like a regular weekend or a vacation day, but you are still working.
- 2. Set up virtual childcare.** Reach out to friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents, babysitters, even teachers to arrange virtual playdates for your kids. They can talk, read, play games, sing, do dances and much more, all online.
- 3. Plan unsupervised activities.** Babies will give you a breather during nap times, but [here are some ideas](#) you can plan ahead to engage your baby while encouraging self-

exploration. For toddlers and grade-schoolers, create activity boxes that contain games and puzzles that require minimal adult supervision, along with trustworthy apps and their favorite, brain healthy shows. Older kids will most likely be busy with online schooling, but will also need some suggestions that are guided with their input. They may value opportunities to learn new skills (e.g., carpentry, sewing, painting a wall, bike maintenance, cooking) so they can contribute to the household or to the greater community.

4. **Prioritize your schedule.** Aim to schedule engaging activities for the kids during the time you need to be most productive.
5. **Split the work.** If you have a partner, consider taking shifts. One person watches the kids in the morning while the other works, and vice versa in the afternoon. This allows some time where your focus is purely on work.
6. **Reinforce positive behaviors.** When you see your children practicing brain healthy behavior, let them know you noticed as it happens. Reinforcing positive behaviors in the moment builds new pathways in the brain that establish good habits.
7. **Take breaks.** Because kids' attention spans are short, your work will likely need to be done in chunks. If you need uninterrupted work time, you may need to continue working after they've gone to bed or wake up earlier in the morning.
8. **Monitor screen time.** Healthy screen use is about balancing three factors: time, quality and buddies. Temporarily engaging in more than usual screen time during COVID-19 isn't going to be a detriment to your child, just help them aim for moderation and balance in the types of screen-based programs/activities they choose.
9. **Find a space.** Finding a space with a door that can be closed reinforces the message that you are working. If a space has internet access it can act as an office.

Compiled from multiple resources including: [www.cnbc.com/2020/03/17/working-at-home-with-kids-during-covid-19-crisis-with-kids-underfoot.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/17/working-at-home-with-kids-during-covid-19-crisis-with-kids-underfoot.html)

Now, give yourself a break. It's just not possible to juggle everything: to be 100 percent present; to oversee all the homeschooling with complete efficiency; and do your job, even if you are a stay at home caregiver. Sometimes we just need to let go and say, "close enough." It is common in our culture to push ourselves— physically, mentally and emotionally, often beyond brain healthy limits.

All that superhuman pushing can feel so productive—until it doesn't. Until you're exhausted, overextended, overwhelmed, or otherwise ready to snap. To promote your brain and body health, and fight brain and body illness, it is important to understand what your body, mind, and spirit can take. If you feel physically, mentally, or even emotionally exhausted, understand that is normal, especially under current situations. Listen to your body, listen to your heart, and your mind and give yourself a break when you need it. Give yourself a hand, you are doing a great job!!

**About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org))**

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to promoting brain health and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. Through education, research, innovation and action the collaboration between Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance intends to build brain healthy communities with cultures that increase brain health protective factors and reduce risk factors, improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Gulf Coast region and beyond. Join the movement, lifestyle makes a difference.

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