

SLATE

You Are Not Your Child's Teacher

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You are their parent.

You don't need to panic about educating your child

during quarantine. Don't focus on schoolwork.

Focus on being together when you can.



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Amidst the chaos of schools and offices closing, spring break cancellations, and frantic grocery hoarding, parents now feel that they must take on the full weight of their child's education. On the [Slate Parenting Facebook group](#), parents bemoan their inability to teach math, worry about their children falling behind, and throw up their hands at the idea of working a full-time job *and* somehow educating their kids. You might feel the same way. You might be thinking, right now, *How on earth am I supposed to be my child's teacher, on top of everything else?*

Take a deep breath. Now, say this out loud: "I am not my child's teacher. I am their parent."

You have not suddenly become a home-school teacher overnight. Unless you were already home-schooling your child, as I do, the responsibility of reading, writing, and arithmetic still lies with their school. While teachers and school systems are working on ways to best meet standards in this new, uncharted world of large-scale virtual learning, parents can calm themselves.

You do not need to run out and purchase a home-school curriculum. You do not need to watch YouTube videos on teaching seventh grade Common Core math. You do not need to cram every hour of your child's day with educational advancement. Your primary focus should be where it always has been: on the well-being of your child.

Children thrive on routine and right now, all of that is gone. As a parent, you can provide a framework that keeps their brains active, as you likely already do in the summer. Academic achievement and testing benchmarks are a construct, constantly adjusted to fit educational philosophies. Don't worry about them right now. Worry about supporting your children as they process what is happening in the world.

The entire world is standing still. Your child is not falling behind. When school starts again on the other side of quarantine—in May or in September or whenever—every teacher will remember, and take into account, that nearly every child in the world experienced the same learning hiatus. Kids will still get into college; they'll still learn long division and the difference between the executive and the legislative branch; they'll still learn to read, write, and think, even if they do nothing with this time but binge Netflix and snuggle with you when your work is done.

The greater risk to our children, and ourselves, is the stress we are adding to all our lives by believing that parents have to take on the full weight of education. The lesson to be learned from home-schoolers (and teachers) is that what kids need goes far beyond classroom instructional time. A typical homeschool schedule for elementary school kids only has about two to three hours a day. The balance of each day is filled with exploration, reading, household tasks, and learning to manage boredom. Your child's school schedule is much the same. Hours of their day are spent not on memorizing facts and learning new concepts, but on social interaction, games, and daily classroom tasks.

Once you have relieved yourself of the burden of educating your children, you can shift your focus to teaching them how to cope with the unexpected. This is a time to lean in to your children, providing them with extra love and support. Spend the time you would have been commuting cooking together. Spend your lunch break eating as a family and read together afterward. Start game night traditions if your evening sports are canceled. Agree to a family walk once a day, before work requires your online presence. Your children are going to remember how they felt during the COVID-19 outbreak, not what they missed in math class.

Instead of fighting with your children about their schoolwork, focus on surviving and thriving as a family unit. This may mean shifting your kids' schedules so that their time with you is on the weekend, and weekdays are full of TVs and tablets. That is OK. It may mean that you are happiest with an intricate schedule packed with all the resources schools, libraries, and publishers are providing. It may also mean that, like me, you are wearing noise-canceling headphones, sitting on the floor of the playroom, working on your laptop while the children run amok. These scenarios, and everything in between, should be considered perfect parenting. If your children feel supported and loved, and if everyone is going to bed mostly happy, make yourself a tinfoil star and put it on your computer right now. (Or, if you hate crafts, eat an Oreo.) You are winning.

I can't promise you that everything is going to be OK. But I can promise you that if your child learns nothing during this pandemic but how to deal with the unexpected and how to care for themselves amid chaos, they will have learned more than any book could teach them. You are not your child's teacher, but you are the parent. Take a deep breath.