

Adoption



Foster Care

*The mission of Children's Aid Society is to identify and provide services to improve the lives of children and their families.*

**Post-Permanency Newsletter**  
Winter 2020

## Fun Winter Activities You Can Still Enjoy (Even During a Pandemic)

By Lisa Milbrand— October 30, 2020

You can make the most of these winter months with these pandemic-friendly things to do.

As the coronavirus pandemic stretches into nearly a full year of impacting our daily lives, it can feel like it's hard to find any fun in your day-to-day routine. (Life at home can feel a lot like *Groundhog Day*—and not in a good way.) Finding winter activities that bring you joy may be even more of a challenge as temperatures drop, when it's not as easy to get together with family and friends safely because of weather.

Winter officially begins December 21 (and there are plenty of fun things to do in December normally), but with cold weather common well before then in many parts of the country and indoor activities unavailable or unsafe, you may be looking for great outdoor winter activities or things to do at home when it's cold out before you know it.

### Winter activities during coronavirus

#### Enjoy the Outdoors (socially distanced)

- Have an epic snowball fight
- Go sledding
- Try friluftsliving (enjoying an outdoors lifestyle)
- Make a snowman or a snow fort with people in your household
- Go snowshoeing
- Make snow angels
- Go stargazing
- Take a wintry hike
- Try ice skating

#### Try Some Wintry Crafts

- Build a gingerbread house
- Cut paper snowflakes
- Make a birdfeeder out of pinecones, peanut butter and birdseed
- Create homemade valentines
- Knit a scarf

#### Reconnect with Loved Ones

- Bake cookies to share with friends or neighbors
- Build a pillow fort
- Enjoy a living room picnic
- Plan a virtual game night
- Host a movie marathon of all your favorite movies

#### Get a Taste of Winter

- Load up a cup of hot cocoa with marshmallows or whipped cream
- Bake a pie
- Make and enjoy eggnog
- Make baked apples
- Make homemade caramel popcorn
- Simmer a pot of homemade soup
- Make snow cream
- Indulge in a big stack of pancakes slathered with maple syrup
- Have a little fondue

#### Enjoy Some Much Needed Self-care

- Cozy up by a roaring fire (indoors or out!)
- Watch the snow fall
- Breakout a jigsaw puzzle or work on a crossword puzzle
- Spend the day in your PJs
- Cuddle up with a blanket, cup of tea and good book

#### Try Something New

- Pick up a new hobby
- Start some seedlings
- Host a virtual book club
- Plant an amaryllis bulb or other flowering plant to bloom
- Stick with a New Year's resolution

# 5 ways to help keep children learning during COVID-19 pandemic

UNICEF Global Chief of Education

1. **Plan a routine together.** Try to establish a routine that factors in age-appropriate education programs that can be followed online, on the television or through radio. Also, factor in play time and time for reading. Use everyday activities as learning opportunities for your children. And don't forget to come up with these plans together where possible.

Although establishing a routine and structure is critically important for children and young people, in these times you may notice your children need some level of flexibility. Switch up your activities. If your child is seeming restless and agitated when you're trying to follow an online learning program with them, flip to a more active option. Do not forget that planning and doing house chores together safely is great for development of fine and gross motor functions. Try and stay as attuned to their needs as possible.

2. **Have open conversations.** Encourage your children to ask questions and express their feelings with you. Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress, so be patient and understanding. Start by inviting your child to talk about the issue. Find out how much they already know and follow their lead. Discuss good hygiene practices. You can use everyday moments to reinforce the importance of things like regular and thorough handwashing. Make sure you are in a safe environment and allow your child to talk freely. Drawing, stories and other activities may help to open a discussion.

Try not to minimize or avoid their concerns. Be sure to acknowledge their feelings and assure them that it's natural to feel scared about these things. Demonstrate that you're listening by giving them your full attention, and make sure they understand that they can talk to you and their teachers whenever they like. Warn them about fake news and encourage them—and remind yourselves—to use trusted sources of information such as UNICEF guidance.

3. **Take your time.** Start with shorter learning sessions and make them progressively longer. If the goal is to have a 30- or 45-minute session, start with 10 minutes and build up from there. Within a session, combine online or screen time with offline activities or exercises.

4. **Protect children online.** Digital platforms provide an opportunity for children to keep learning, take part in play and keep in touch with their friends. But increased access online brings heightened risks for children's safety, protection and privacy. Discuss the internet with your children so that they know how it works, what they need to be aware of, and what appropriate behavior looks like on the platforms they use, such as video calls.

Establish rules together about how, when and where the internet can be used. Set up parental controls on their devices to mitigate online risks, particularly for younger children. Identify appropriate online tools for recreation together. In case of cyberbullying or an incident of inappropriate content online, be familiar with school and other local reporting mechanisms, keeping numbers of support help-lines and hotlines handy.

Don't forget that there's no need for children or young people to share pictures of themselves or other personal information to access digital learning.

5. **Stay in touch with your children's education facility.** Find out how to stay in touch with your children's teacher or school to stay informed, ask questions and get more guidance. Parent groups or community groups can also be a good way to support each other with your home schooling.



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## SWAN Post-Permanency Services

*These services are available to any family who has adopted and lives in Pennsylvania, whether or not they adopted their child from foster care, and to those families who have provided permanency to children from the foster care system through permanent legal guardianship or formal kinship care.*



**statewide  
adoption and  
permanency  
network**

*Families self-refer by calling the SWAN Helpline (800-585-SWAN) to request these services. The services are part of a continuum of services that strengthen and support families and assist in strengthening the special needs adoption community at the local level.*

## 10 Tips to Ease Anxiety During COVID-19

By Jennifer L.W. Fink, RN, BSN – July 2, 2020

The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic is causing a lot of fear, stress, fatigue, and worry, even in people who are normally unfazed by stressful situations. Some people are experiencing panic attacks; others note increased anxiety about going out as businesses reopen and local restrictions are lifted. Insomnia, exhaustion and confusion are common, with some people reporting COVID anxiety dreams. Use these tips to ease COVID-19 anxiety and cope with pandemic-related challenges.

1. **Control your media exposure.** The COVID-19 pandemic generates new headlines every day, but you do not have to immerse yourself in the news cycle. Most TV and radio stations replay the same stories multiple times per day, and social media sites often highlight the most sensational and heart-tugging coronavirus-related stories. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledges that “hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting” and recommends taking “breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including those on social media.” Whenever you feel anxious, step away.
2. **Get the facts.** There is a lot of misinformation circulating about the coronavirus and governmental and civic response to the pandemic. Don’t accept as truth everything you see and hear. When you hear disturbing information, take a deep breath. Tell yourself, “I don’t yet know if this is true.” Don’t invest emotional energy into a response until you know for certain that information is accurate.
3. **Implement COVID-19 precautions.** You can’t control coronavirus, but you can significantly reduce your risk of infection by practicing good hand hygiene, wearing a cloth face covering in public and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance between you and people who are not part of your household. If you or another member of your household is at high risk of infection or complications, you may also want to limit outings. Taking action to protect your health may give you a sense of empowerment and decrease feelings of anxiety.
4. **Get outside.** Research has shown that spending time in nature can relieve stress and anxiety—and that spending time cooped up inside can increase anxiety. So, aim to get outside every day if you can. A 2019 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* found that spending just 20 minutes in nature can lower stress hormone levels in the body. Another study found that a 90-minute walk in nature may slow negative thinking. If you can’t get outside, spend some time looking out the window or watching nature videos.
5. **Spend time with supportive friends and family.** Human beings are social animals, and the isolation of coronavirus lockdowns took a serious mental toll on many people. It’s still not a good time to gather in large groups, but regular interaction with other human beings can alleviate anxiety and increase your coping skills. Note: Spend time with people who lift you up, not those who drag you down. Avoid those who drain your energy or exacerbate your anxiety.
6. **Exercise.** According to the CDC, even one session of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity reduces anxiety. So, when you’re feeling particularly stressed, take a break and move. Go for a run or a bike ride. Dance. Weed your garden or play chase with your kids or dog. Regular exercise can decrease your overall stress levels, and studies have shown that most people experience significant benefits when they get about 20 minutes of activity at least 3 days per week.
7. **Develop a financial plan.** Money is one of the biggest sources of stress for Americans—and that was before the pandemic caused record levels of unemployment. Denying or avoiding your financial difficulties won’t help, though. Instead, develop a plan. Shave expenses where you can. Contact your mortgage company or landlord, bank and credit card companies and ask for accommodations. Apply for government relief programs.
8. **Reframe your thoughts.** Faced with the uncertain trajectory of the pandemic, it’s easy to think, “Things are never going to get better,” but that’s not exactly true. Challenging and reframing your thoughts can help you avoid sinking into negativity. Do not automatically believe your anxious thoughts. Instead, note what your thought is telling you; then, challenge it. Is the thought accurate? Is it helpful? What would a more positive person think in the same situation? Rephrasing your thought to “things are tough right now, but better days, are ahead” is more accurate and less likely to provoke anxiety. A counselor can help you reframe your thoughts if you are struggling.
9. **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is simply noticing, observing and focusing on your present circumstances. When you start to worry about the future, it can be helpful to bring yourself back to the present moment. One way to practice mindfulness is to sit quietly and focus on your breathing; when your thoughts stray, bring them back to the rise and fall of your chest as you inhale and exhale. You can also take a mindfulness course or use a meditation app to guide your practice.
10. **Make art.** Talent isn’t necessary either. Immersing oneself in a creative endeavor can quiet the mind; art is also a way to express and process emotions. According to a study published in *Art Therapy*, 45 minutes of creative activity significantly reduces stress.