



OFFICE OF EDUCATION משרד החינוך

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WEATHERING THE COVID-19 CRISIS AT HOME

Some thoughts from Rabbi Nochem Kaplan, Merkos Chinuch Office

The schools are closed and children are all home, likely until after Pesach, so the challenge now is to make sure that they and their parents use the next few weeks advantageously. I have been asked to put together some tips to help parents (and their children) cope. Remember, it is important to keep an upbeat mood in spite of the difficulties the situation presents. Here are some thoughts

1. Keep a regular schedule:

Parents should create a daily schedule and maintain it. Creating a sense of order through regular routines is essential, it will give children a sense of security and help keep the parents sane.

- Children should rise at a reasonable hour (don't succumb to their kvetching about getting up).
- Have the children daven and eat breakfast at a regular time and then get to some learning
- Schedule as much of the day as possible but be sure to give children enough down time, also regular intervals.
- Of course, they should help with Pesach preparations but they should be busy with regular pseudo-school related activities most of the day for the next two weeks.

2. Davening at home:

Getting children to daven properly at home can be a challenge, (more difficult when it's on an ongoing basis). You must institute a regular system and routine.

First, set aside a place where distractions are at a minimum for davening, they should use the same place every day.

Here are some details (based upon Rabbi CMA Hodokov's instructions to me):

- Some schools have arranged for children to join in communal virtual davening, by all means have your children join.
- Children under the 6th grade should spend no more than 25 minutes davening
- Children should follow the exact same davening routine they practice at school; they should not skip around.
- A family with a few children close in-age can set up a "minyan" and daven together with children alternating as chazan.

3. Doing school work:

Most schools will arrange for some on-line instruction, make sure the children are prepared. They need to have someplace conducive (with as few distractions as possible).

- By all means have older children help their younger sibs but don't put the responsibility for their learning on the older children's shoulders.
- Keep a log of their learning and tell them you will send it to their rebbe/teacher.
- Complement them when they do as expected, to show that you are aware and care.

4. Change activities and their pace Frequently

Bear in mind that children have a (very) short attention span so no activity should last more than a half hour.

- Have children read (and read to sibs who can't) and then write a little story about what they read.

- This is time when children can be encouraged to find a hobby. (when I was a youngster, we were encouraged to collect pictures and letters of the Rebbe, as we grew older, we collected letters and קונטרסים. The Rebbe told some of my peers to keep a diary.)

5. **Help children understand without frightening them!**

- Explain that there is very little danger for young people. If they contact the virus, they will be unwell for a few days and recover fully.
- There is real danger for some older people and for those who have a compromised immune system (their bodies have been weakened and can't fight of infection easily) Carvid-19 can have terrible consequences. It is for them that we are most concerned. We should not however, frighten children into thinking their all older people are in סכנה ה"ו of death.
- We need to follow the guidelines of doctors and the health department scrupulously!
- Children should be told to say a few מזמורי תהלים daily and be told over and over, that שומר ישראל הקדוש ברוך הוא is the שומר ישראל.

6. **Maintaining a social connection:**

Children need to maintain social connections but without actually meeting their friends. There are definitely concerns about children's unsupervised using social media so it must be supervised and limited. Many Rebbes and Moros will get the whole class together for a lesson, they should also have opportunities to exchange chatter and information.

- This is a good time to help children use their writing abilities when communicating.
- Don't be alarmed if they seem to be spending a lot of time on the phone.

7. **Maintaining your sanity**

These will be trying times for parents, especially those blessed with large families. And on top of it all its before Pesach. On the bright side they can help with Pesach preparations). It's easier said than done, but keeping a sense of calm will help everyone cope.

- Complement the children whenever you catch them doing something good. Just be sincere and specific, don't say you're being a good boy but I liked what you just did or said.
- Keep emphasizing that we are all the hands of הקב"ה, (some people just didn't know it before) and 'we have בטחון that He will keep us safe.

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