FAMILY LEISURE PLANNING
AND COVID-19

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Introduction

When we discuss ‘family,’ we are not just talking about biological relatives. Families come in many forms, and include single parents, step-parents, grandparents, two moms, two dads, and close friends. Many of us choose our families with people we love and want to spend time with. Some people may not have relationships with biological family members, but identify close friends as family members. Who offers you acceptance and love? Who do you turn to when you need support and encouragement? Who do you celebrate your successes with? Who turns to you when they need support or help? Think of these people as we discuss family throughout these pages.

Why is Family Leisure Important?

Family leisure can be viewed as activities that family members choose to do together in their free time. Most people find it challenging to prioritize leisure. However, there are many health benefits associated with leisure engagement! Shared family leisure can have benefits on individual members of the family and the family unit. Think about your own experiences! Have you ever played a game with your family and felt less stressed afterwards because you were having fun? Maybe you felt closer with your family members, as well. These are examples of how family leisure can benefit individuals and the family unit as a whole. 1 2 3

Examples of family leisure include playing games together, reading together, going out on a walk together, going on a trip, or going to the movies together. When compared to other responsibilities, family leisure might not seem important, especially when considering the ‘free-time’ aspect. Families may have to ‘make’ time for family leisure participation! It is helpful to understand the benefits of what families are ‘making time’ for.

Research conducted by the Temple University Collaborative found that parents with significant mental health issues lack social supports related to parenting. Individuals with serious mental health issues are often discouraged to take on life roles such as a parent, professional, or student due to false assumptions that these roles may be too stressful for the individual. Parents with serious mental health issues, just like everyone else, should be supported to view parenting roles as a source of strength and meaning. Providers should connect parents with significant mental health issues to parenting resources, including those focused on family leisure, that promote positive attachments, social support, and parenting skills. 4

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What is core and balance leisure?

Core family leisure are activities that are free or low-cost and take place close to or inside of the home. These activities are part of everyday family routines. Examples of core leisure include watching television together, playing games together, and eating meals together.

Balance family leisure includes activities that typically occur outside or away from the home. Balance leisure usually requires more planning, finances and happen less often than core leisure. Examples of balance family leisure include going on vacation, taking a trip to a museum, or going to an amusement park.  

How has Covid-19 Impacted Leisure?

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in big ways, including children and adolescents. Lockdowns and stay-at-home orders—necessary for the health and safety of our communities—led most leisure spaces outside the home, like restaurants, community centers, gyms, museums and movie theaters—to close their doors. At the time of this writing, in March 2021, many leisure spaces have re-opened with policies such as social distancing, limited hours, and wearing face masks to ensure health and safety. Indeed, many people have found themselves struggling to socialize with others while maintaining physical distance.

Because our participation in the community has been limited, we have fewer places to go, resulting in decreases in physical activity. When we don’t have places to go, we are more likely to be sedentary, which can impact our physical and mental health. With family members unable

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to go out to the places they used to, taking part in balance family leisure has been difficult. At the same time, family leisure has never seemed so important!

**Boredom: An Opportunity for Discovery?**

Over the course of the pandemic, some people have found a bright spot in having more time to explore old pastimes and new hobbies. Individuals and families have taken up hobbies like baking, sewing, playing boardgames and doing puzzles, drawing or painting, and playing musical instruments. Have you ever wondered why you start exploring a new leisure activity, or return to an old hobby?

One factor that can lead us to engage in leisure is boredom. Do you know that feeling you get when you feel antsy, like you want to do something but you’re not sure what? Or maybe there is something that you want to do—like going to the movies—but you are unable to due to Covid restrictions, financial constraints, or other barriers. This is boredom!

Feeling bored sends us a message that it’s time to try something different. The circumstances of Covid-19 may increase the amount and frequency of feeling bored among family members. It’s not so easy to say “let’s go to the movies!” or “let’s go to a restaurant!” when movie theaters have closed and going out to eat presents health risks. Not having places to go in the community can lead families to get ‘stuck in a rut’ and lose motivation to engage in shared family leisure.

When family members express ‘feeling bored,’ we can view this as an opportunity to engage in a balance leisure activity together!

**Balance Family Leisure During Covid-19**

On the following pages you will find instructions for three family leisure activities that would typically fall into the “balance leisure” category: going to a restaurant, going to the movies, and going to a park. We have adapted the first two activities to take place in the home. Feel free to adapt these activities based on the materials and resources that are available to you! Be sure to check out the “Additional Resources” section, which contains comic strips matching each of the three activities. We suggest looking at these comics with your child as a first step in planning a balance leisure activity. While this document was developed to encourage balance family leisure at home as we continue navigating the pandemic, the activities and resources in these pages can be used at any time!

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Additional Resources

Balance Planning Checklist

Are planning to engage in family leisure outside of the home? Keep this checklist handy to make sure that you have everything you need!

- Clean face masks
- Hand sanitizer
- Disinfectant wipes
- Wallet
- Keys
- Travel directions
- Water / snacks

Notes:
Activity Instructions: Restaurant At Home!

**Needed Materials:** Markers, paper, cardboard or poster board for restaurant sign; ingredients and cooking supplies; scrap paper for menus

1. **Choose what you will be serving.**
   Start by choosing a cuisine for your restaurant! You could pick a family favorite place and try to recreate your favorite dishes or choose a type of food you all love to eat.

2. **Name your restaurant.** Next, pick a catchy and fun name for your restaurant!
   Incorporate names or add a personal twist to the name of a restaurant you love!

3. **Make a sign.** Make a DIY sign to hang for your restaurant. Post it in your dining area or kitchen above the door so people know your new restaurant!

4. **Create menus.** Once you have a name and a sign, create a menu with food and drinks for your guests. This could be done by hand or by a computer.

5. **Assign roles.** The next step is to assign roles, such as chef or server, to members of the family. Dressing up in outfits that fit your restaurant theme will make the whole experience more fun!

6. **Don’t forget the bill!** When dinner is over, create a bill for the guest and make sure to serve/pay it!
Activity Instructions: Let’s Go to the Movies (at Home)!

**Needed Materials:** Markers, paper, cardboard or poster board; movie snacks such as popcorn, water, or fruits and vegetables; scrap paper; television or computer for watching a movie

1. **Schedule a time to have your movie night.** Be sure to include time to prepare everything before showtime!
2. **Choose a movie.** Write down a few options and take a vote of everyone in your household.
3. **Choose a name for your movie theater.** Come up with a fun name, or even use a family name!
4. **Make a “Now Playing!” sign.** Gather markers, paper, cardboard or poster board. Write the name of your theater at the top. Below this, write “Now Playing <title of movie>”
5. **Make the concession stand.** This is where you will give customers movie tickets and serve snacks and drinks. Write down what snacks, drinks, and tickets cost.
6. **Make ‘money’ out of scrap paper.** Make sure everyone has enough to get a ticket and snack.
7. **Assign roles.** Have one person work the concession stand and another person be a customer. If you have 3 or more people, assign two people to work the concession. Each person can be responsible for different tasks.
8. **Get into it with improv!** Improv is almost like playing pretend. Try role-playing the parts of employee and customer!
9. **Prepare snacks.** You can put popcorn or chips into plastic cups or even a mug! Use what you have, even if it’s something you wouldn’t find in a movie theater.
10. **It’s showtime!** After taking tickets and serving snacks, get comfortable and watch the movie! When the movie is over, take a few minutes to clean up together. Talk about this experience you shared! What did you like most about this activity?
Activity Instructions: Nature Scavenger Hunt

1. **Choose a theme.** Start by choosing a theme for your scavenger hunt! These are usually determined by the location and/or season. A theme could also be based on colors or shapes, anything you could think of!

2. **Think of items to find on your scavenger hunt.** Once a theme is chosen, begin to think of items that you could find.

3. **Consider the ideas listed below to include on your list!** There are many kinds of scavenger hunts you can choose from!
   a. **Traditional:** rocks, feathers, pinecone, shell, flower, three-leaf clover, berries, spider, animals, moss, log, etc.
   b. **Senses:** Something green, something red, something yellow, something fuzzy, something soft, something hard, something that makes a noise, something that smells, something that you can fit in your hand, something that is bigger than your hand
   c. **How Many?:** How many rocks can you find, how many leaves can you fine, how many branches can you find, how many squirrels can you spot, how many birds have you seen?
   d. **Trash Clean-Up:** One thing not found in nature, a balloon, a plastic bag, a water bottle, a soda can, a straw, a fast-food bag, an item of clothing

4. **Prepare your scavenger hunt list!** This could be written as a list or as a bingo board!

5. **Choose the location, date and time of your scavenger hunt.** You can go to a favorite neighborhood park or discover a new park! Decide on a time limit for the hunt and start when ready!

6. **End the scavenger hunt with a prize!** If you want to end the hunt with a “prize,” consider a cup of hot chocolate if it’s cold out, or a glass of lemonade if it’s warm.
Comic Strip: “At-Home Restaurant”

1. Hey Mom, can we go out for dinner tonight?
2. With the pandemic, places are closed. We could try to have our own restaurant at home instead! Let's ask your other mom.
3. Mom, could we make our own restaurant at home tonight?
4. I think it's a great idea! It'll be fun.

First, we must name our restaurant! How about Mia and Moms Co.?
I love that it's great! I'll start making a sign!
I can start making a menu for dinner!
AT-HOME RESTAURANT

Don't forget we must all have roles! I'll be the chef!

I can be the server! Mom, you and Mom can be guests first when the food is ready!

That sounds like a good plan!

Cool! Let's get started!

AT-HOME RESTAURANT

Server! Dinner is ready to be served to our guests!

Coming!

Hello, My name is Mia and I'll be your serve today. Can I start you off with drinks?

I'll take a water please!
After dinner ...

**AT-HOME RESTAURANT**

That was a really good dinner and a really fun way to have it! Can we do it again?

Yes! Next time I'll make an even better meal!

Of course! I had fun too! It was great!
Comic Strip: “Movie Theater at Home”

MOVIE THEATER AT HOME

Hey mom, do you think we could go to the movies soon?

Aw man, I miss going to the movies.

Maybe we could have our own movie theater!

Great idea! Let’s ask now.

Really? We could ask dad and see what he thinks.

What about tonight? It’s a movie night.

Cool! Could we have our own movie theater this right?

Yeah, that’s awesome!

MOVIE THEATER AT HOME

What movie should we watch?

What movie should we watch?

Maybe we could watch “Kung Fu Panda”?

Cool! I’ll make a concession stand with popcorn and snacks!

Yeah! I’ll start making a sign for what movie we’re showing!
MOVIE THEATER AT HOME

Hello sir. Can I get 3 tickets for Moana and 2 small popcorn?

Here you go. Keep the change!

Now Playing: MOANA

Of course. That will be $9 for the tickets and $3 for the popcorn.

Thank you so much! This popcorn tastes great.

No problem! Enjoy!

MOVIE THEATER AT HOME

I really like this movie. I'm glad we chose this one.

Me too!

That was great! I loved the concession stand. We should do this again.

Yeah, me too! Thanks, Dad.

The End!
Comic Strip: Nature Scavenger Hunt

**NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT**

- An acorn
- A rabbit
- An orange tree
- A squirrel eating
- A girl on a bike

Here is a short list I made! Let’s see how many of each we can find!

- **Mom**: Here are a short list I made! Let’s see how many of each you can find!
- **Girl**: Yay, let’s go! Hurry up!
- **Girl**: I think I even see a rabbit!

**NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT**

- Look over there! Is that a squirrel?
- Yes, and it’s eating under the orange tree! Cross them both off the list!
- An acorn! It is near your tire!
- Good eye! I’ll cross it off the list!

- A girl on a bike! The last item on the list.
- Of course! I loved spending the day outside with you.
- I had so much fun today! Thanks, mom!

- **Girl**: Look over there! Is that a squirrel?
- Yes, and it’s eating under the orange tree! Cross them both off the list!
- **Girl**: An acorn! It is near your tire!
- **Girl**: Good eye! I’ll cross it off the list!

- **Girl**: A girl on a bike! The last item on the list.
- **Girl**: Of course! I loved spending the day outside with you.
- **Girl**: I had so much fun today! Thanks, mom!
Activity: Nature Bingo

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Bingo

B I N G O

ROCK  FEATHER  PINECONE  SHELL  FLOWER
THREE-LEAF CLOVER  SPIDER  LOG  SQUIRREL  LAKE
BIRD  MUSHROOM  FREE SPACE  BUTTERFLY  RABBIT
LADYBUG  TREE STUMP  BIG LEAF  ACORN  SNAIL
TWIG  ANT HILL  WORM  ANIMAL PRINTS  BIRD’S NEST