

*How I learned to stop stressing and home school my own way - In the weeks since lockdown began, I have totally reset my own home schooling goals as a working Mum based on advice from teachers and mental health experts. Have a read through my blog and give me your thoughts.*



### **Covid-19: Settling realistic goals when balancing home-schooling and working**

A friend recently shared some advice given by a UK head teacher to parents with me. **I loved it!** The statement highlighted the reality of schooling children at home and made me reset my own goals.

Mr. Hellett, a primary school head teacher in Hastings UK, sent an open email to concerned parents with reassurance for those adding their children's education at home to an ever growing list of dramatic life changes caused by the ongoing pandemic restrictions. In the message, he said that the situation that we parents find ourselves in is not home schooling. It is in fact "... *an unprecedented emergency situation impacting the whole world...*" reminding everyone to try to keep perspective of this fact. He reminds parents that this is very different from home schooling by choice and that for those who do consider this the best way to educate their children; it is done with precise and careful planning. He goes on to detail that, in the current situation, both parents and professionals are all working things out as they go along, encourages parents to achieve what they can and try to step away from unhelpful comparisons vs ideals and the norm.

It's really important to remind ourselves of this when we see the exhaustive lists of online advice to follow on how best to home-school from ensuring routine, regular exercise, limiting screen time, choosing the best online courses, showing an interest in your child's work and the list goes on! The colourful home schooling schedules, healthy recipes and exercise routines designed by parents while sometimes helpful, can also add to the pressure we place on ourselves. I want the best for my children, but I think there needs to be a balance between what is healthy for the entire family and education – Absorbing every element of advice can become exhausting at best (contradictory and

impossible at worst) and social media posts begin to take on an almost competitive air at times. All of this can combine to leave parents worrying “Am I doing enough?”

Mr. Hellett added a particular point in his message for those also trying to balance with work, newly shifted to a home environment, which really stuck with me:

*“It is absolutely not possible to facilitate distance learning with a primary aged child and work from home at the same time. The very idea is nonsense.*

*If you're trying to do that, stop now. You can certainly have activities where your child learns, but your focus is your job, and survival. Again, unprecedented. Stop trying to be superheroes.”*

### **What UK mental health and schooling experts are saying**

During the past few weeks, there have also been a growing number of articles in UK new papers warning of the consequences of placing too much pressure on children during these difficult times.

According to an article in the Telegraph, “psychologists and education experts are warning of a mental health crisis if parents pressure children to study too much while juggling home schooling with their own work commitments”.

Andrea Chatten, founder and managing director of emotional psychologist group Unravel, claims

*“If we don’t prioritise wellbeing now, we face bringing a heap more problems back into schools when they reopen.”*

The Welsh education minister, Kirsty Williams insists that parents “give themselves a break” and I find that I am inclined to agree! We can quickly become our own harshest critics when attempting to do what we think is right for our children. Remembering that, each family’s situation can vary greatly in terms of; access to IT resources, availability of parents for supervision of work, difference in learning abilities, is often overlooked. Not to mention kids’ temperaments! One size simply cannot fit all, when it comes to education.

### **Setting goals and realistic expectations.**

UK teachers have widely been sharing realistic home-schooling goals of 2 hours work per day for young children and 4 hours per day for older children during the lockdown.

According to Scottish education experts - Children should not be expected to make the same progress as they would in school. Teachers will get a sense of what stage children are at when they return to the classroom.

They advise providing a structured day such as set meal times, and times for outside exercise (if possible) to help allow a degree of normality. The focus should be on children’s wellbeing and keeping them happy and stimulated, particularly considering their boundless energy and the fact that they largely must stay inside with no opportunity to socialise beyond their household during the lockdown.

## What can we learn from this?

I expect that many of us will emerge from lockdowns, with a renewed appreciation for the work of schools and teachers. Many of us will have seen first-hand, educators doing their very best to provide an education with no time for pre-planning to upgrade their technology or develop e-learning techniques. If there is a positive to draw from the situation - parents, teachers and children are learning to work more in partnership to adapt.

Employers have also had to very quickly adopt flexible working practices and I suspect many companies will continue offering more flexibility post the pandemic in terms of working from home and more flexibility to allow for individual family situations. This pandemic has certainly shaken our worlds, but perhaps we can take valuable lessons from this experience, not just in gaining a sense of perspective we may not have had before, but also highlighting the need to put our mental health ahead of education.

So, where do I go from here? Having taken the advice of these professionals to heart, I plan to approach home schooling with a new attitude. My goals on what can be achieved, how much time I can realistically supervise education while working will be based on what is realistic for our own personal circumstances, and what is sensible for our own mental wellbeing.

While the days of lessons from home, and having more first-hand involvement with my kids' education may be with us for some time yet – Days of guilt that we didn't complete every work sheet, sign up for every on-line webinar and map all of our progress in individually crafted, colour coded curriculum planners are most certainly over for me.



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### About Karen

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