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HOUSEBOUND ACTIVITIES

This is a new situation for all of us. We are not just Home Alone, we are HOME – ALONE – TOGETHER!!! What on earth are we going to do?

Most children do best in routine, structured environments (with some surprises!!). Think about putting some of these activities into your day-to-day routines over the course of these days of 'home-alone-together'!

You can add your own and pass them on

FAMILY TREE

Why don't you and the children start a family tree? You can provide the basic information – your own dates of birth and those of your brothers and sisters – and then the dates of birth of your parents. Then work backwards and see how far back you can go. Research on line to follow your family back through time and generations.

You can use rolls of old wallpaper, rolls of cooking parchment or sheets of ordinary A4 paper joined together with *Pritt Stick* or *Sellotape* to draw up a family tree. You will find some great ideas and demonstrations of How to Draw a Family Tree on YouTube.

You can give your children old photographs and other memorabilia to enrich the experience. Then add on some family stories and 'myths and legends'. Talk about family traits – from hair colour to music or artistic ability, interest in cats – whatever! Follow typical family names down through the generations. Identify major events in history across the generations of your family.

Some useful – free websites for family-tree research are:

www.irishgenealogy.ie
askaboutireland.ie
nidirect.gov.uk/proni

genealogy.nationalarchives.ie
databases.dublincity.ie
familysearch.org

HOMELAND WILD LIFE SAFARI

Wild Life is everywhere – including your own garden and (whether you like it or not) your house! From the birds in your garden to the silverfish in your bathroom, there is a wonderful world of fascinating wild life all around you and your children.

Without causing any harm to any creature (even the silverfish and the spiders), why don't you and your children make a wild life history of your home. Take photographs, draw pictures, download information, identify connections in nature (e.g. the bees who pollinate our flowers) – and compile the *Book of Wild Life in our Home*.

Some useful websites for this activity are:

Irish Wild Life Trust – www.iwt.ie
www.batconservationireland.org
www.bbc.uk (check out their wild life pages).

Owls.ie/kids-wildlife
www.birdwatchireland.ie

STAR GAZE

Don't go Stir Crazy – Star Gaze instead. During this housebound time, you and your children could become astronomers! Check out the night sky – it is magic – and much bigger than any problems or worries here on Earth.

Go on line with Astronomy Ireland – www.astronomy.ie

You can also download the Night Sky app from the App Store. This allows you to point your smartphone or ipad at the night sky for identification of the planets and stars.

And – the names of the star constellations lead us very nicely into Greek Mythology – why not go there - a Magical Journey without having to leave home! Two-in one - Space Travel and Time Travel! Just Google the names and see what comes up.

GYM

If wild life is everywhere – everywhere is also a gym! It will be very important to stay active and to get exercise.

Can you and your children identify parts of your home and garden that provide opportunities for exercise? Draw on what you and your children have learned from your sports coaches,

dance instructors, and Pilates and yoga instructors. Put together a daily, fun workout for everyone in the family. Needless to say – different strokes for different folks – make it safe for everyone involved!

Using the dining table for table tennis; playing games of hide-and-seek; setting up a race/obstacle course in the garden; bouncing a ball while reciting poems, counting in twos, threes, fives, etc; or reciting your times-tables – all count!

FINE DINING

Looks like all the restaurants are closed now. But don't despair. You have the makings of a perfectly good restaurant in your own home – including excellent staff and dining company.

- Explore and perfect new *signature dishes* and new menus. Bake Cakes! You might not be able to get all the ingredients you want – but just think how this will call on you to be creative and inventive! And baking and cooking can provide loads of experience for measuring, weighing etc. (maths!!!) – not to mention – reading recipes.
- Dress for Dinner – Sunday clothes – or have whacky dinner themes (including appropriately whacky outfits and make-up).
- Sit around the Dinner Table. Use all sorts of cutlery and dishes. Go on line and find fun ways to fold table napkins and serviettes. Design and make table decorations.
- Plan some topics for conversation. For example, you could all share a book or film and then talk about that at dinner. You could talk about family holidays – past and future! You could chat about how far you have come on your family-history project. The chef for the evening could invite the other diners to guess the ingredients in the dishes

ENTERTAINMENTS

With all of our technology nowadays, we are never short of entertainments – but they are very often passive and solitary. Now that we are all stuck at home together – can we devise some shared entertainments?

- How about putting on a family play – rehearsals will use up plenty of time and dressing-up can be so much fun.

- How about A Noble Call – a get-together where everybody presents a party-piece – a song, dance, mime, poem etc.
- Dance Night – yes – why not learn some new dances (well, old and new; Irish; Latin whatever!). There are loads of demos on YouTube. Dancing is not only shared fun – it is great exercise. Start with ‘*Shoe the Donkey*’!!!
- Learn some poems off by heart (English/Language and Memory skills!) or the times-tables (Maths and Memory skills!) and recite these as you go about chores, workouts and dance routines.
- In Iceland, they have a great tradition of reading to each other. How about that?
- Or, how about Silent Reading Together. Cosy-up and crash out with a book. In silent reading together, you can all read your own books – stretched out on the sofa, curled up in an armchair or camped out under the table. Readers can offer to read aloud little snippets of their book that they really like or would like to share, or they can ask each other about what they are reading.

GET ARTY-CRAFTY

Time to take out all the Crayola stuff that Santa brought!

- How about a big family mural or collage? A collage can be made up of drawings, paintings, cut-out pictures, photographs, bits and pieces of ordinary stuff, clips from literature or old sayings and little personal notes. It can follow a theme or just take on a life of its own – see where it goes. Who knows, you could be making a piece of history; a family heirloom – something your grandchildren can show on Antiques Roadshow!
- Party Games are not just for Christmas. Dig out the trivia quizzes and all the party games you play at Christmas and get stuck in. The same goes for board games and card games.
- Santa may well have brought some jigsaws too over the years. They can be great fun – as a joint, ongoing project.
- Explore some crafts like knitting and crochet (boys and girls!!!).
- Build huge (or small) projects with Lego and Meccano. You can also use these activities to explore fractions; shapes; patterns etc. (more maths!). These activities

can help to develop visual skills and hand-eye co-ordination – reading diagrams, identifying separate parts, copying from models and handling small pieces.

- Write a story together – or even a book! You could do this in Circle Time. Each person in the circle adds the next line to the story. You could also collaborate on a family diary, with illustrations.

ARMCHAIR CRITICS

Organize for the family to get together to watch a film, play, concert or match on television (this could be recent or old). Then, discuss!

Did you find it good, bad, disappointing, enlightening etc.? Why? What did you like? What did you learn? Who did you like best? Why? What made you sad, cross, happy? Why? What would you change?

GET READY FOR SPRING/SUMMER

- In the garden, tidy away dead vegetation and bits and pieces blown about by the past few storms. But, please, please be careful not to disturb sleeping hedgehogs and other creatures who are still hibernating, or little birds who have already begun to build their nests! So, don't lift large stones or flower boxes; don't dig out boulders, banks or tussocks – and be careful about clipping back ivy and shrubs.
- Build some bird boxes (best not to put a perch stick outside the entrance hole as this allows invader species to stand at the door and rob the eggs or chicks!!). This is craft work too.
- You could also design and build a special fairy garden. Again – arts and crafts!
- Scrub down the garden furniture.
- Paint garden furniture, shed and fences.
- In the house – prepare for the seasonal *change-of-wardrobe*. Pull out your summer clothes and mend, repair, clean, ready for when summer comes. It will come!!!
- How about the big Spring Clean – all hands on deck!!!

HOME SCHOOL

Schools are doing their best to put school work on-line and teachers may have set some homework for your children. Make sure that this is done in a daily-routine way. You can also extend learning into the play activities:

- Maths – shopping lists and money; time-tables; calendar work (e.g. counting how many weeks to your birthday); board and card games; cookery; spotting angles and various geometric shapes about the house and garden; playing with water and sand.
- Language – shared reading; armchair critics; dinner discussions etc.
- Arts and Crafts – collage, story illustrations, bird boxes and fairy doors, table decorations, Lego and Meccano.
- Biology – self-care and hygiene when there is a nasty virus about; the immune system; good diet – how to plan and cook a healthy meal.
- Irish and European Languages – Incorporate some Irish and other languages into your daily conversations.
- Memory – learn some things off by heart.

There are also some very good sites and programmes on line to keep us all busy – such as

- Duolingo and Busuu – free language learning (including Irish) – perhaps best for teenagers and adults
- The Khan Academy – for maths and science – www.khanacademy.org
- Math Playground
- Cool Science for Kids
- PBS Kids Science Activities
- Science News for Kids
- Biology.ie
- National Geographic for Kids
- Environmental Education Programme for Primary Schools

If every cloud has a silver lining (and it is difficult to think that way in the present circumstances) – then this crisis might bring out the best in us – taking care of each other, being responsible, and spending fun time with valued loved ones (at close quarters!).

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