

## A Father's Covid Blog

Parenting during the full Covid lockdown caused myself and my wife, as parents of three young children, (4, 9 and 12) to ask ourselves many questions. Not necessarily the constructive ones such as, are we giving them enough attention, how are they being affected by not being able to play with their friends and are we sharing responsibilities equally? No, let's be honest, like many parents we were asking: Why are they so badly behaved? Will they ever do what they are told first time? Why is it impossible for them to sit at a table for more than 5 minutes to do their schoolwork? Why do you keep asking me stupid questions? Are they like this in school? Do they ever stop eating? When will all this end? We both of course felt terribly guilty about asking these questions and feeling this way about our kids but I suspect we are not in the minority. The practicalities of the five of us sharing a relatively small space were of course magnified by the full lockdown (and by moving house in the middle of it). However, the division of labour has always been pretty even in our house but we tend to gravitate toward different things whilst of course maintaining the skills to do the things we don't usually do as one of us might get fed up doing the bits he/she usually does so the other person has to step in. If I am really honest, do I think that there is a faultless division of responsibilities between myself and my wife? Well no. We are different people. My wife tends to do the caring things like playing with the children (I don't have the patience), reading bedtime stories (I'm too tired by then and therefore have no patience), making sure they are washed and clothed (I haven't a clue what clothes I should be wearing never mind the children) and putting together a world class school lunch (improvements are continually added and the menu changes from day to day so I can't keep up). Whereas I tend towards the goal orientated tasks like cooking, tidying, fixing the WIFI and other technologies and bringing the children to sports (at last count the two eldest do 7 different sports between them) and other activities. The washing drying, folding and putting away of clothes has to be a shared activity as it is such a mammoth and unending task. But as I said there is of course a lot flexibility and no set rules. In fact, I am very much against rules, as god knows at the moment we need all the freedom we can get. Having said that I do believe in the need for some sort of structure to try and counteract the utter chaos that living with three kids under 13 during full lockdown actually was. For example, in contrast to the prevailing view if another proper lockdown is to happen and the schools close again, I am very much in favour of children of school going age getting school work to do and lots of it! In fact, home schooling was one of the aspects of the last major lockdown that I very much enjoyed. My wife says that I am a closet schoolteacher and enjoy being in charge, but it's not just that. School work meant telling them to put down their devices (as tablets, Xboxes etc., are known in our house) before they plunged into their fifteenth DanTDM or Flamingo video (Flamingo is in my opinion the very worst of the gaming Youtubers, he just screams at the computer screen and we don't need any more screaming) and sit together at the dinner table for an hour or two and actually achieve something. On a more general note you might be thinking, given my list of grievances above where are the positives (by the way I've just been downstairs and I would like to add Why can't they ever stop arguing? to the list, my four-year-old being the biggest culprit in this regard). The answer of course is that I love them and often the chaos is exciting, and you just have to go with it. I was of course under no illusion as to impact that having children would have when my wife and I decided to have a family. I didn't expect it be plain sailing, (although I do sometimes fantasize about a life where I return from work whereupon I am handed the evening paper and then retire to my study occasionally consenting to consultations by appointment only) but I don't think anyone really understands it until you are right in the middle of it. I know that those of you who have been through it and now have older children who have perhaps left home will tell me to cherish these times as they are over so fast. I certainly don't agree with the fleeting nature of the experience as in many ways, I feel like I have lived three extra lives over the last twelve years and I have been awake for most of it. But then that's just me!

