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## LEARNING FROM HOME AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP CLOSER TIES WITH CHILDREN



**With school closures looming, parents are understandably anxious about the challenges of educating their children from home, as well as the difficulties this might pose for their children. QUT researcher Dr Rebecca English is an expert in home education and believes the new circumstances offer surprising possibilities.**

“This is not home schooling because the parents haven’t signed up for this,” Dr English states. “It’s not a choice. The first thing parents need to understand is to be gentle with themselves and their children and understand that it will take a period of adjustment.”

It’s important for parents to know that their home environments are not going to look like school, and that their children’s days won’t resemble a school day. Dr English points out that a school day is six hours because there are established structures that fit around that, but that this is not a reason to assume a day of home education needs to look the same.

“If there’s a booklet of work, for example, it’s not going to take as long as it would at school. Think about your time at work. You have other conversations, have a casual chat. For children in particular, though, it’s going to be hard to get their heads around, ‘Home is where I learn now.’”

Dr English mentions the concept of “deschooling”, a process by which students moving to home education spend time getting their thoughts in order and coming to understand their new learning environment.

“Everyone’s been thrown into it, a state of flux. The more we treat our children as a party in our family, as agents in our family, the more they will step up to that. With gentle guidance and respect and using firm limits we’re all going to make this work.”

Despite parents’ worries of being responsible for their children’s education, Dr English is quick to point out that home schooled children often outperform students who went through the schooling system. She cites recent US research showing that this is especially true for students from disadvantaged minority backgrounds.

“Teachers will be providing excellent communication home to their students, so uncertain parents should take comfort from education research showing that of parents who didn’t finish school, of minority families where they don’t do as well in school, they do much, much better in a home situation.”

One of the most common criticisms of home education is the claim that it denies children the opportunity to form social bonds with their peers. Dr English is adamant that this is not the case, and that especially today, students learning from home will have ample opportunities to maintain and develop their friendships.

“Technology will be really helpful, and many activities that the students do now will move online. Music classes, martial arts, all of these will continue. Not just for the social activities but because they’re small businesses that need to survive. All these activities will continue. But parents really should ensure that students have access to their friends and peer support.”

As an expert in home education, Dr English is keenly aware of the benefits offered by this system. Even though this situation wasn’t most parents’ choice, she hopes they will see this as an opportunity to bond with their children and experience aspects of their growth they never otherwise would have seen.

“We can see this as an experience, an adventure, literally a once in a generation thing. Maybe if we can frame it positively and work with our children, we can see them in a new light. We rarely get to see how our children learn after the age of five. What a wonderful experience to be able to see your child learning and working. Trying to be positive is the best way to get through this.”

“If I had an older child I would be telling them to take comfort in the fact that everyone’s in the same boat, not just in their school, but in Australia and the whole world. We’re all in this together, and that’s part of what we’re going to learn from this.”

For more information, see

Rebecca English’s profile on *The Conversation*: <https://theconversation.com/profiles/rebecca-english-22377/articles>

Rebecca English’s eprints at QUT: [https://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/English,\\_Rebecca.html](https://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/English,_Rebecca.html)

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