



I wrote this about trying to teach children at home in Nelson

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/parenting/moe/30-04-2020/the-reality-of-routine-at-home/>

The reality of routine at home

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[Partner content](#)

In the [second part of a new series](#) sharing the stories of families learning from home during lockdown, Charles Anderson tries to impose some order on his household and learns that disorder is OK too.

It was somewhere between week two and three of level four lockdown when Ivie Anderson, aged 5, began to have a meltdown about not being allowed to do “fun stuff”, like go to the supermarket. “It’s not fair,” she yelled. “You get to go in the car. You get to go buy things.”

This was our benchmark for fun now. But it wasn’t really about fun, it was about a break in routine. Our precious routine. It was something we’d really tried to institute in our family of four.

We tried to have somewhat set hours of what was “school” time and what was everything else. That would allow all of us to have a semblance of



structure. The kids (Ivie and Elijah, aged 12) could do some learning, I could do some work and, a few days in, it seemed to be functioning.

When it was the school holidays, we let the kids write their own list of what they wanted to do. The list acted as a writing exercise for Ivie as she practised her letters and sounding of words. The list could include anything they wanted, but there needed to be a balance. Next to each task, there was a box to be ticked. For Elijah that might include finishing his school assignment, practising his guitar or reading to his sister before he could play Fortnite against his mates. For Ivie, that might include writing a story, drawing a picture, making muffins, patting the cat, jumping on the trampoline, or screen time, as well as having breakfast and getting dressed. Maybe we would also go for a walk or a bike ride.

Then at 12.20pm, we would all sit around the TV and watch RNZ's Aotearoa History Show on Home Learning TV. We would watch as the minutes tick by and it became apparent that schedules, even for TVNZ, were malleable these days. We would learn about New Zealand dinosaurs and the New Zealand Wars and then we would have lunch. After that, well knock yourselves out. Play, have fun, live! Then at 3pm each day, my wife and I would try and do some exercise, swearing at a laptop screen as a trainer encouraged us to feel the burn. Trying to do anything productive after that hour was wishful thinking. There was dinner to be made, cleaning to be done, guilt from not spending enough time with your children to be assuaged.

It seemed to be functioning. That routine seemed to allow everyone to carve out a bit of time for productivity, learning and themselves. We plodded through the days that seemed to melt into one another, doing our drawings, our writing, our stories, our activities.

Then it came to that one day a week where I would jump in the car, loaded up with sanitiser and Dettol wipes, and head to the supermarket. The day



that Ivie had a meltdown. Our routine would not save anyone from those feelings of isolation, those feelings of longing for anything normal, even if it might be walking down an aisle of pasta sauce. It would not save Elijah from feeling sad at not being able to hang out with his friends or his dad who was stranded in a different city for the level four lockdown. It would not stop me from totally prioritising my work time over that of my wife's. Her work, in my mind, was as absent from the routine as it has been in this piece of writing. And that was a problem.

That would all come to a head when just last night, after we'd all just watched the latest Pixar movie, I had my own minor meltdown which saw me walking around the block with a glass of wine in hand, sobbing into my elbow. I missed my dad too, it turned out.

The reality is what you're reading is way past deadline. Elijah's school assignment is way past deadline. We're both sitting in different rooms on laptops on a Sunday morning, while Ivie watches the original Peter Pan (and then Return to Neverland) eating toast spread with brown sugar and cinnamon. That was a vision never imagined by the routine.

I let a 21-day meditation challenge, set by a friend, lapse after day three or something. I didn't factor inner peace into the routine. For a few days in a row, I didn't do any exercise. For a couple of weeks, I was drinking quite a lot.

The deadline for the delivery of this piece was set with the best of intentions and the best information available at the time. It was a goal that was created after consulting our daily household routine. Yes, we had structure (sort of). There was a formula (-ish). But, come Friday afternoon, I watched those best of intentions sail past. I waved as they went by.



That's felt like the best way to approach these past few weeks. To embrace a routine as rigid as pizza dough. The routine for learning is just a broken routine that's created moments you couldn't write on a list. I've watched Ivie and Elijah have more time together than they ever have and seen them lean on each other for support. I've watched as he has read her book after book, her cuddled up to him, hanging on his every word. I've watched as he's come up with fantastical characters for her to colour in, name, cut out, and then stick on her wall. They've made stories together out of dice covered in pictures of Star Wars characters ("Dart Fader dug up a magic wand and found a robot ..."). There's been learning in the serendipitous, the unplanned.

There have been times when Ivie wanted a family ninja pillow fight on the trampoline. Sometimes it went on the list, sometimes it was organic. So we bounced around belting each other senseless for 20 minutes until we all collapsed. There have been times when we all just started dancing after dinner, while the dishes sat in the sink, swinging each other around listening to 1990s pop hits never heard by a boy who was fresh off hearing Travis Scott's latest tunes drop on Fortnite. These times are important. My wife and I have also talked through the importance of her work routine and making that a priority too.

Really, a routine in these times is something that isn't going to stress you out. Because who cares if Elijah's Fortnite time stretches over the limit agreed on because the game he's playing isn't finished, or if Ivie watches "just one more" episode of Lion Guard? What if I spend some of the free time I carved out for myself not actually working but suggesting to Elijah's teacher a really interesting reading comprehension about the rise of llama's in children's toy culture, complete with a potential line of questions?

We're all just muddling through and sometimes the best stuff doesn't have a box to be ticked.