

Special Report / Home education

Make a timetable but skip the class warfare

Claire Belle Freed shares some tips to help you sail through lockdown learning

It is the word met with groans and heart palpitations by parents across the country. The word we prayed would not be uttered again. But as soon as Boris Johnson made his announcement at the beginning of January, it was the concept we all needed to embrace – reluctantly, joyfully, or with a side of gin and tonic: home-schooling.

After my husband and I home-schooled my seven-year-old and five-year-old during the first lockdown (while also juggling a baby and jobs), we swore that it was something we could never do again.

I, much like many of the optimistic population, attempted to make the best of the situation. I made a timetable, a meal plan, snack allocations (they eat 48 snacks a week. I did the maths), daily walks, those blasted Joe Wicks workouts, and I told myself, as my brilliant father often reminds me during times of crisis, that “this too shall pass”.

Well, it did pass. Momentarily. And now it is back. And the kids are bigger, more demanding, and (I don't know how it is possible) hungrier than before. Google Classroom is still installed on every device, but this time around all attempts at timetables, menus and routines have been chucked out the window. Along with my sanity, and any hopes of a conversation with my husband before 8pm.

But have we learned anything from the first round of home-schooling? Besides what a conjugated vowel is. Have things changed this time to make home-schooling easier? Or does it fill parents with the same dread that descended in March?

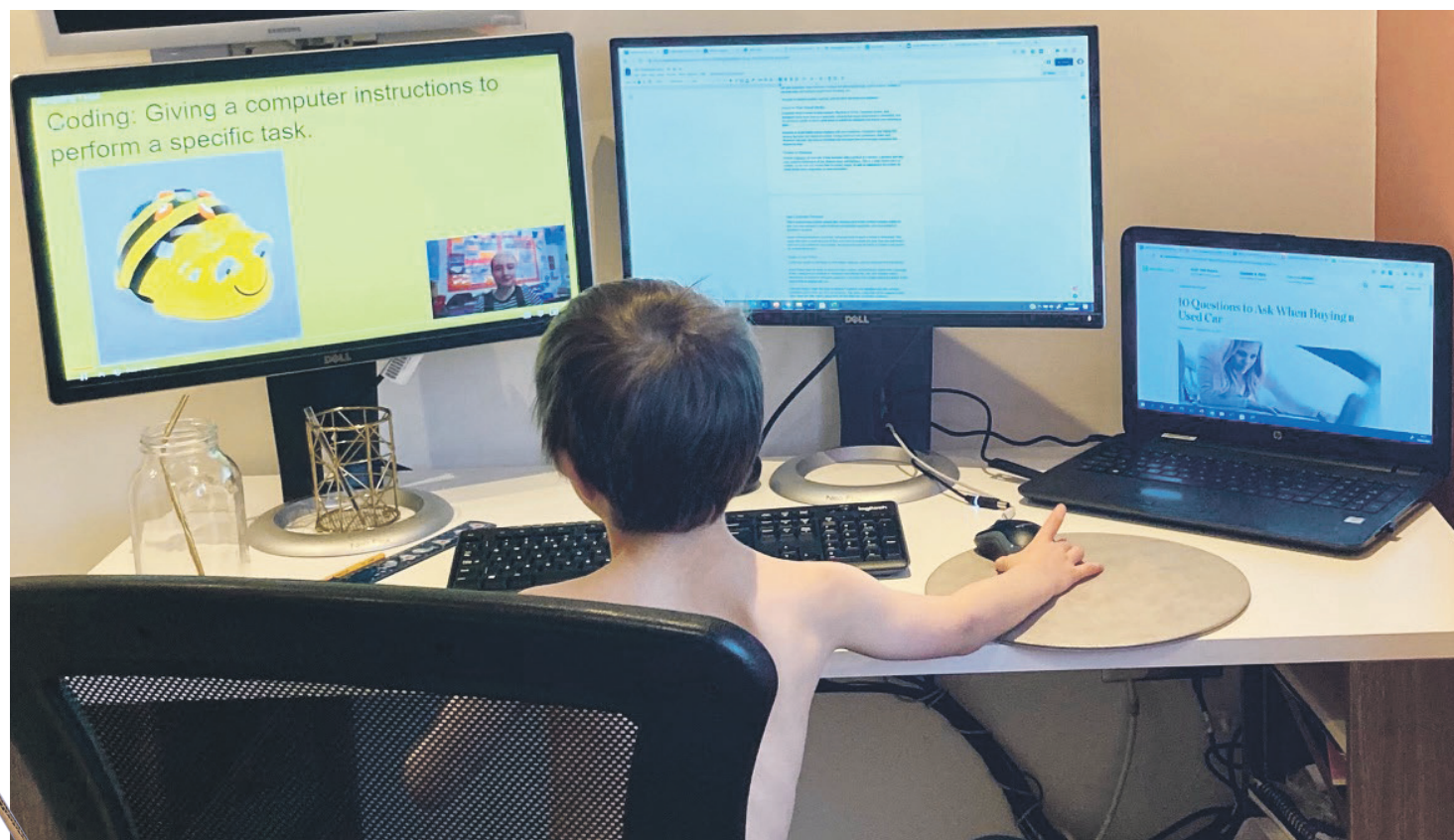
“It's just far more than I can take,” said a mother whose children attend a Jewish primary school in north London.

“My husband and I both work and, as we are not key workers, our children are home. We must work, or we won't be paid. And we must home-school, as the gap in schooling is already so big. It's unsustainable.”

Michal Dwek Rosenbaum, whose children attend Rosh Pinah, is coping far better this time around.

“The first time, I hated home-schooling. There were no lessons and no structure. We were all so frustrated.”

So, what has changed? “The school has really stepped up to the plate. They have live lessons



Claire's five-year-old son Teddy takes over the office at home to learn coding. Inset: A makeshift art project thanks to Amazon deliveries

every day with follow-on work. This has created far more structure and normalcy.

“I can leave them to get on with lessons and do what I need to do around the house. Even though they miss their friends so much, this structured way of the school being in control of lessons is making it easier.”

If you are struggling (guilty), Joanie Adler, of Joanie Adler Education, has valuable advice to help us navigate through the learning landmine.

“Get into the habit of a routine. Kids of all ages respond so well to structure. This will also help parents to carve out time for breaks, getting on with their own work, snack time and screen time.”

Speaking of screen time, it can be so tempting to let them binge, but Joanie stresses: “No screens until their work is complete. Try to get them to focus on calming activities if you need to concentrate on work or helping another child.”

She also advises to have realistic expectations. “One-to-one requires a lot more focus and concentration. Follow their lead. If they are getting distracted or

irritated, then take a break. This will give you all a chance to calm down and regroup.”

Loren Palman, a teacher at a Jewish school in London, agrees. “My advice to parents who are keen to strike a balance between providing the right environment for home-schooling is to create structure for yourself and your children. Create a timetable that suits you, a time for the

children to get up and dressed and be ready to start learning.

“Try to incorporate an activity towards the end of the day that the children can look forward to. This will help to restore a sense of normality and family life that can get lost during lockdown.”

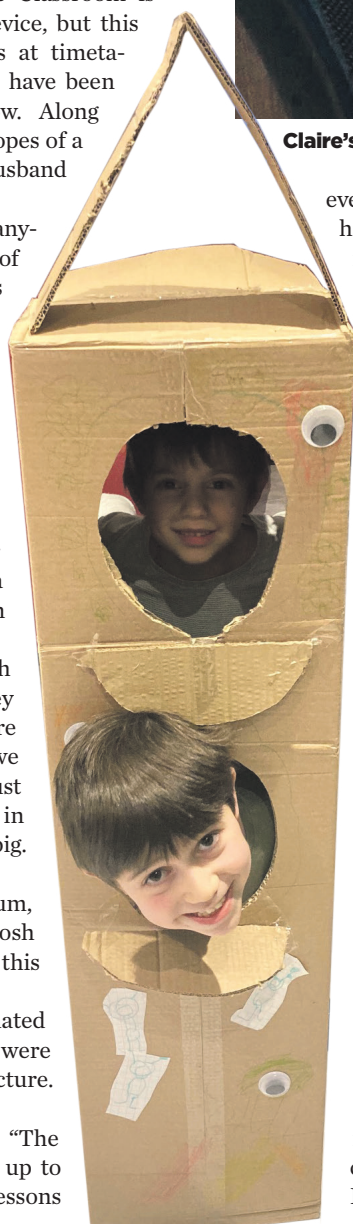
And what about the overwhelming amount of pressure we parents find ourselves under, I ask her. “Don't put too much pressure on yourself,” Palman continues.

“Even as a teacher, I have struggled at times to home-school my own children. We find ourselves in exceptional circumstances and ultimately the well-being of our children, and ourselves, is paramount.”

Working, lessons with the kids (begging them to sit still and pay attention), uploading work, preparing three meals a day for everyone, keeping the house clean, laundry done, fridges stocked and everyone happy and healthy is more than most people could ever cope with. Yet, we are doing it. We are educating our children, whether we do one lesson a week or all of them. And, as exhausting as it can be, I can't help but feel proud of all of us.

Whether you have embraced it or hate it, just remember you are not alone. We will get through this, and if it means a little (or a lot) of extra screen time, *Among Us*, bribery and snacks, then do it.

Schools will be back. Our lives will be back. And we will be able to reclaim our homes once again. Just like my dad says: “This too shall pass.”



“Miriam's son opens a business. In the first year he makes a £15,000 profit. How many people does she tell?”