

# KEEP IT SIMPLE, KEEP IT REAL



These recommendations come from one of the most highly regarded BCBA's in our field. Dr. Francesca Espinosa is from Italy and serves families of children with autism. She has seen firsthand the challenges COVID-19 has presented for families in her country. She recently provided insight into the humbling experience of trying to support families who are now faced with long days at home with limited or no ABA treatment for their child.

Dr. Espinosa **encourages families to focus on getting through one day at a time.** Being overly concerned about “losing skills” may result in a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness as this drags on.

Instead, consider that within a single day there are many activities which can be perfect opportunities for learning, and you **can teach your child a lot in the coming weeks.** Having time pass each day with structure, predictability and some simple shared enjoyment is important right now-more important than trying to become an ABA tech for your child.

Getting outdoors, to benefit from sunshine and movement is so important for overall regulation and keeping sleep schedules consistent. We have generated these tips from her talk:

**READ ON FOR 4 TIPS TO GET THROUGH EACH DAY  
BY KEEPING IT SIMPLE AND KEEPING IT REAL:**

1

**SCHEDULE:** Structure each day from waking up to bedtime with activities/routines and put them in a visual schedule. Everyday activities are rich with learning opportunities that do not have to be *planned, created*. Using the visual schedule, show your child what is going to happen next using simple language if necessary “It’s time to \_\_\_\_\_.” Then be sure to follow through by helping your child complete the activity at whatever level they need. If your child needs “warning” then set a timer (Time Timer app is great) and show them that “Pretty soon \_\_\_\_\_ it will be time to \_\_\_\_\_”. Try to keep mealtimes and bedtimes consistent and similar to when your child had a full day of school, therapy, etc.

2

**LIMIT:** Limit your child’s free access all day to most preferred toys/activities. This may mean putting many toys/remotes, iPads, etc. out of reach so you can use them to reward your child for completing activities on the daily schedule. If you have all of your child’s favorite items out where they have access at all times, you will have to compete with those each time you want your child to do something with you. He/she will also tire of them and you won’t have strong reinforcers to reward them with for completing activities.

3

**REINFORCE/REWARD:** With most favorite items, toys, etc. out of reach/sight show your child what you expect using “First\_\_\_\_, Then\_\_\_\_” when you want them to work on something on the schedule. Consider “star tokens” for activities that may be less preferred for your child. If your child does not prefer an activity, show them the token strip and provide a star every few moments they are complying with the activity (“Good job coloring...keep going...”) so they can see they are moving toward being “done” and getting to do a more preferred activity.

4

**PLAN:** Plan for siblings too! Include siblings in the schedule whenever possible so your child has another person to imitate/watch. OR, if you have younger siblings plan more structured activities with your child when the younger sibling is napping. Identify times of the day that are “high-risk” for problem behaviors and try to have other children in the home occupied with other activities. Be sure to share those “high-risk” parts of the day with your BCBA during parent support sessions. Together you can come up with preventative strategies.