

How families can comfortably share close quarters

As the COVID-19 pandemic stretched on, families had to adapt to changing situations. Quarantine proved challenging even for the most resilient people, and families sharing close quarters had to find ways to stay calm and comfortable under one roof.

During the pandemic, families have spent more time together thanks to school closures, remote working and social distancing restrictions that limited contact between people who live in different households. The home improvement resource BobVila.com says that the average home in the United States is around 1,760 square

feet, but when everyone is clamoring for a spot to spend most of their days, even the most expansive home can begin to feel a bit too confined. The following are some ways families can live comfortably when sharing close quarters for extended periods of time.

• Designate personal spaces. Bedrooms can be private respites, but they're not necessarily the best places for people to spend the majority of their time. Try to create nooks that family members can call their own, like a man cave in the garage or a desk in a spare room for school les-

• Designate times for common areas. Make a schedule that designates spaces for specific times, particularly for those who may need uninterrupted study or work periods.

• Establish defined routines. Stick to a routine so that everyone at home knows what to expect and when. Parents can work around children's school schedules when they know how school days are arranged. Children can avoid interrupting meetings if they realize that meetings occur at the same time each day. Set break times for meals so everyone can take a break and spend time together each day.

• Voice concerns and keep communication open. Family members should be able to freely express frustrations, anger or even fear of situations without being judged, according to the wellness resource Step to Health. Make sure everyone in the home recognizes others' feelings are valid.

• Get out when you can. Family members can opt for safe interactions with friends or peers when needed. Engaging in conversation or getting a perspective from someone outside of the home can be beneficial. Even a short stroll alone outdoors can help to reduce stress. Parents of young children

may want to establish a "quaranteam" with other caregivers so they can get a respite outside the home and leave the kids with trusted help.

• Use this as an opportunity to grow. Spending more time together can be beneficial. Use the time together to make meals as a family, talk more, engage in family game nights, and build stronger relationships.

Some patience and cooperation can help families make the most of spending so much time together at home.

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