While we're spending more time at home, we may find ourselves wanting to complete home improvement projects. However, with the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 on hospitals, emergency rooms and urgent care offices, we should take even more care to prevent serious injuries.

Follow these tips to stay safe during home improvement projects:

• determine what protective clothing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) you will need for the job
• have a first aid kit on hand
• eliminate tripping and falling object hazards
• never stand on chairs or unsteady objects; use a ladder or step stool
• always follow safety guidelines for power tools
• properly ventilate areas when painting or using other chemicals
• use proper lifting techniques
• do not perform jobs that require a professional, such as roofing, electrical work, or gas pipes, unless you have professional knowledge
• if you must have a professional repair person come to your home, be sure to practice proper social distancing, wear face coverings, and clean and disinfect after they leave

If you do have a medical emergency, seek care immediately, but remember it is always best to prevent injuries before they happen.

During a public health crisis that has now spanned several months, it is critical that New Yorkers continue to have reliable water and wastewater service and our customer services staff have been there to ensure just that. Tiffany Oxley is a dedicated member of the supervisory team supporting the Customer Service Call Center. In the early weeks of the pandemic, she helped to establish our first full-time, remote call center, which eased traveling concerns for many staff. Victor Eskenazi and Dominic Pesce are two of our many Call Center Representatives who continue to serve our 840,000 customers on a daily basis. They are all faced with the same challenges that so many other public servants face, such as reporting to work every day, regardless of what's going on around them. They say, “the smallest of things can make the biggest impact.” We appreciate and applaud their professionalism and resilience.

Paul Perri and James Werner are members of the essential team that installs, repairs and calibrates water-quality monitoring stations on New York City’s reservoirs. The network of robotic monitors collects and transmits water quality data in near-real time to our scientists and operators. These data allow the Bureau of Water Supply to monitor the reservoir system and send the best-quality water to the city at all times. The monitoring network collected approximately two million data points in 2019.
Family Balance During COVID-19

For several weeks now, many of us have been wearing a number of hats—employee, teacher, and parent (anyone caring for children). For those of us who feel like we’re sinking beneath the surface in order to keep our children afloat, here are a few suggestions, tricks, tools, and a little validation.

Don’t try to replicate a full school day: It can be a struggle to dedicate 100 percent of yourself to work and remote learning at the same time so prioritize—get done what you can, and forgive yourself for what you cannot. If you are finding it increasingly difficult and unrealistic to keep up with your child’s school assignments, have an open dialogue with your child’s teacher. Teachers are a tremendous resource and by partnering with the teacher you can better strategize the best approach to meet your child’s needs in a way that is manageable for you and your family. For example, if you are spending a lot of time each day helping your child with math assignments, the teacher may be open to a Zoom meeting to go over the math lesson, thereby freeing up your time and mental energy.

Have a schedule: With children, a schedule should not be rigid but should lay out things in a clear way to work and remote learning at the same time so prioritize—get done what you can, and forgive yourself for what you cannot. If you are finding it increasingly difficult and unrealistic to keep up with your child’s school assignments, have an open dialogue with your child’s teacher. Teachers are a tremendous resource and by partnering with the teacher you can better strategize the best approach to meet your child’s needs in a way that is manageable for you and your family. For example, if you are spending a lot of time each day helping your child with math assignments, the teacher may be open to a Zoom meeting to go over the math lesson, thereby freeing up your time and mental energy.

Have dedicated work and school boundaries: For those teleworking, having a dedicated work space limits distractions, helps you be in the proper headspace, and allows you to “arrive” and “leave” at the end of the day. The same can be said for having a dedicated “school” space for children. It allows them to more easily switch from play/break time to school/work time and back again. When space is limited, even sitting at a table facing away from people and objects that may cause distractions will help to create an environment more conducive to focusing.

When working from home with children you are likely to have interruptions. Sometimes their needs are trivial and sometimes they are more urgent. From a child’s perspective this is a hard distinction and they may not realize that you are in a virtual meeting, composing an email, or engaged in some other work-related task, but these constant starts and stops wreak havoc for parents who have to switch from employee to parent and back again. A trick some parents are using is to have a sign or even a special hat your child can wear that signals, without verbally interrupting, if they need something in that instant. Other parents are finding it more effective if they put up a sign (or wear the hat) to signal that they are not to be interrupted.

Practice self-care: If you don’t spend time on your needs you will not be as present as you need to be to care for others. Therefore, make sure you are eating and sleeping well and take time for an activity that you find enjoyable. While this can be easier said than done during a day packed with work responsibilities, and parenting and assisting children with remote learning, prioritizing your needs will benefit everyone.

Virtual support group: DEP will be hosting a virtual support group for parents this Thursday, May 28, from 5pm–6pm. It will be facilitated by Director of Staff Support and Assistance Jonathan Glotzer. Participants will receive tips to help manage the responsibilities mentioned above and have a chance to connect with other DEP employees who are balancing parenting with remote learning and work needs. For more information on joining, please contact Rachel Reeves at reeves@dep.nyc.gov. If you would like to discuss any issues you are facing, please reach out to one of these free and confidential resources:

- NY WELL: 888-NYCWELL
- OLR’s EAP: 212-306-7660 eap@olr.nyc.gov
- DC 37’s PSU: 212-815-1250
- DEP’s Office of Staff Support and Assistance: 718-595-3424; jglotzer@dep.nyc.gov

Art & Poetry Contest Winners

The Bureau of Public Affairs and Communication’s Education Office is honored to celebrate all of the students who participated in the 34th annual Water Resources Art and Poetry Contest. This year, we received entries from 1,600 second through twelfth grade students in New York City and the East and West-of-Hudson Watersheds. Student entries beautifully depicted a genuine understanding of and appreciation for New York’s water resources. Please take a moment to view the artwork and poetry of the 2020 Water Champions on DEP’s Flickr page.

We’d like to extend a special thank you to all of the students, teachers, parents, and school administrators who participated in this year’s contest! During this challenging time, the creativity and thoughtfulness depicted in your artwork and poetry has been an inspiring reminder of the importance of the work we do every day to protect our environment.

Watch this YouTube playlist to see a few special thank you messages from the staff at DEP.