

The Impact of Lockdown 2020 on Developing Activities with Children in Families

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ABSTRACT

For about five months, children spent time mainly in the family. The closure of childcare facilities made it necessary for parents to deal with the children at home throughout the day. During the lockdown, caregivers were responsible not only for psychological comfort but also for performing educational and pedagogical functions of raising on their own. Pre-lockdown practices we can track in the data of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey - Higher School of Economics (RLMS-HSE). Based on the self-esteem of Russians and on behavioral practices (active search for information on developing activities with children), an increase in the activation of intra-family practices of physical education, creativity, and training can be recorded.

Keywords: *developing activities in family, lockdown, family functions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Disruption to the usual way of life problematizes the default everyday practices and forces one to reflect on the established patterns of behavior. One of the aspects of the quarantine regime was the interaction within the family. In particular - the communication of children and parents (as well as older relatives living together).

Some continued or improved habitual joint pastime practices; some got a reason to learn them. Kindergartens began to open only at the end of summer, and offline classes at schools resumed on September 1. Organizations of additional children's education and various kinds of leisure centers also suspended work for several months on average. That is, for about five months, children spent time mainly in the family. One way or another, in co-presence or co-operation, children and older family members coexisted in conditions of lockdown for a long time.

What kind of pastime did the parents provide for their children in everyday life? By what means? Did parents have to learn new things in interaction with children to bring children's lives closer to full during the lockdown or so-called self-isolation? Here is presented an attempt to answer the question of how the quarantine affected the practice of developing activities for parents as caregivers and children.

Among the functions of the family, the educational or socialization function is traditionally distinguished [1]. Its basic optimal implementation leads to a balance between the expectations of the family and the expectations of society and is associated with the perception of norms and values [2]. Education and socialization can be understood in different ways and contain more or less simple requirements for parents to shape the child's personality.

According to the latest research by Russian scientists, the first place among the family tasks is the self-realization of

creative abilities, adaptation in society, and the assimilation of its essential values, norms, and rules. The development of mental abilities, education, instilling hard work stay among the most important components in the upbringing of children [3].

With the increasing requirements for the upbringing of a child, the requirements for parental care are growing. The term "professionalization of parenting" is used: parenting in modern society becomes "professional" that is, requiring specific competencies and reliance on expert knowledge [4].

For realizing the educational function by high requirements, families develop their skills or resort to outsourcing. Of all the family functions, it is the upbringing, as well as the function of emotional and spiritual enrichment and family leisure associated with it, that often served by external experts - preschool and school institutions that meet the needs are selected, as well as commercial providers in the field of additional child education and development [5].

For the development of behavioral patterns in a stressful situation, already established practices of interaction with children are becoming critically important. Families in which the activities of parents and children have already woven into everyday life are in a more advantageous position. Parents have pedagogical skills, a material base for classes, a motivational component. Children also perceive this kind of interaction as the norm and more readily perceive their parents in a teaching role.

2. METHODOLOGY

Pre-lockdown practices we can track in the data of the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey - Higher School

of Economics (RLMS-HSE) [6] of the last published wave 27. The HSE Longitudinal Household Survey of the RLMS is a series of annual nationwide representative surveys based on a probabilistic stratified multistage territorial sample. The sample size of the survey was 12161 people. The data of this observation make it possible to find out how widespread some types of developing activities were in the format of joint activities of children and adult relatives, caregivers.

Data on preschool children (children 2-6 years old) and school junior and middle age (children aged 7 to 13 years old) considered separately. The data-driven activities of parents and/or older relatives with preschoolers can be studied in terms of three areas

1. physical activity and sports,
2. creativity: arts and handicrafts,
3. intellectual development.

For schoolchildren, one more item has been added, which is completely obvious to every parent

4. helping with homework.

Any senior family members can act as caregivers; the survey did not specify who exactly works with children. However, in terms of changing daily practices, the composition of caregivers has not changed in the case of cohabitation.

At the moment, RLMS statistics for 2020 are not available, so we tried to track information about whether parents began to pay more attention to the pedagogical process based on the dynamics of search queries relevant to the areas of activity considered based on statistical data. To estimate changes in parents' practices, it was taken the dynamics of the number of queries related to children's development topic in one of the most popular search systems in Russia - Yandex. It is assumed that if the dynamics show a sharp increase in such searches during quarantine, this means that parents are puzzled by the organization of educational/developing activities for children at home and with their efforts.

It is also used the results of statistical surveys by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) on the pastime of parents with children in self-isolation [7]. The survey involved 1,600 Russians aged 18 and over. The survey method is a telephone interview on a stratified two-base random sample of stationary and mobile numbers. Data are weighted by the probability of selection and by socio-demographic parameters.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Pre-lockdown developing activities with children in families

RLMS monitoring data show that in the pre-coronavirus past

- 75% of parents / older relatives of preschool children and 88% of parents / older relatives of junior and middle

schoolchildren did not practice joint physical activities with children or provided any training for children;

- parents / older relatives did not engage in creativity (arts and crafts) with children in the families of 57% of preschoolers and 86% of schoolchildren;
- family did not devote time to classes with children to form additional (to compulsory educational programs) knowledge in 83% of families of preschool children and for 91% - schoolchildren of junior and middle levels.

3.1.1. Preschool children

Probably the most tangible changes took place in the daily life of parents of preschoolers because, unlike schools, kindergartens did not work in remote formats and, with rare exceptions, kept closed since the end of March until the end of August.

Physical activity. Physical activity for children and adults together is a much more powerful teaching tool than talking about the benefits of exercise. Besides, "engagement in cross-generational physical activity was driven by much more than physical health benefits. Children identified it as a unique physical activity partnership, which provided a safe context for practicing their sporting skills. Parents reported that cross-generational physical activity facilitated parenting by providing opportunities for them to teach and nurture important life skills, while also providing their child with support for physical activity" [8].

About 25% of Russian preschoolers are engaged in physical education under the guidance of or together with their caregivers. Another 39% train without parents. More than a third of children, 35% do not practice physical education or sports at all. Of those adults who are engaged in physical activity or sports with children, 16% devote an average of an hour or more to this a day (7 or more hours a week), 21% exercise an average of 20-30 minutes a day (3 to 6 hours in Week).

The concept of early childhood development is very popular in Russia, as well as in the world [9, 10]. This area includes the development of intelligence, cognitive abilities, erudition, and creativity.

Creativity. The share of children under seven years old who are engaged in creative work with their parents or older relatives (under the guidance or as a joint activity) is relatively high - 43%. However, the amount of time is less: in about 10% of cases, the older generation devotes an hour or more a day to such activities with children. Most often - 1-3 hours per week (62%). Approximately 30% are engaged in creativity without the participation of relatives (most likely, they attend classes in kindergartens or special centers). More than 26% have no pleasure to develop creativity.

Intellectual development. The acquisition of additional knowledge in the family is typical for 17% of preschoolers; another 38% usually study outside the family circle. However, for more than 44% of children, classes in this direction are not organized in any way.

3.1.2. Schoolchildren

During quarantine, schoolchildren could continue to attend some sorts of additional classes, enjoying dance lessons through Zoom, foreign language lessons through Skype, etc. Also, they are much more independent in choosing activities for themselves and less need the participation of their parents. Nevertheless, concerning the development of school-age children, the involvement of parents in the process of acquiring knowledge of the child has been proven to have a positive effect on successful learning [11].

Helping with homework. The most common activity with parents for children of primary and secondary school age is doing homework, which we can find in 70% of families. But it should be noted that 80% of the caregivers spend on average no more than 1 hour a day on this per week (perhaps 3 hours on one day, while the next - 20 minutes).

Physical activity. It turned out that 12% of schoolchildren aged 7 to 13 are engaged in physical activities and sports with their parents and older relatives. Classes with parents are shorter than that of preschoolers - in 77% of cases, they do not exceed three hours a week. Almost a third, 31%, do not practice this type of joint activity. And more than 56% are engaged in fitness and sports, while parents see only report cards, bills, and invitations to open competitions.

Creativity. Parents/adult relatives of almost 14% of schoolchildren work with children (supervise the work of children or do creative work with them). In 80% of cases, no more than 3 hours a week are devoted to this. It probably means regular 1-2 episodes of joint creative activity that is it coincides with the frequency of alternative visits to the additional courses.

Intellectual development. Less than 9% of families study the subjects chosen by parents or children to gain additional knowledge with schoolchildren. Half of the students are engaged outside the home and family when parents are not involved. 40% of students under the age of 13 are do not go beyond the limits of a compulsory school program.

3.2. Developing activities with children in families during the lockdown 2020

The closure of childcare facilities made it necessary to deal with the children at home throughout the day. During a pandemic, caregivers were responsible not only for

psychological comfort but also for performing educational and pedagogical functions of raising on their own.

The situation was aggravated by the discomfort of unusual conditions of social isolation, a forced stay at home, and especially by the increased difficulty of balancing between work and family in a situation where all the care for children took place against the background of the parents' working day. From March 25 to May 12, so-called "non-working days" were announced throughout Russia. However, the lion's share of enterprises either did not stop working at all or broke the working process to 1-2 weeks, then switching to the format of remote work. Even in everyday working, parents feel stressed by the lack of time for the necessary communication with children [12]. In a quarantine situation when children need more attention from parents, on the one hand, all family members were staying together; on the other hand, most parents had not a lot of time for communication having part-time or full-time work.

For an indirect, urgent assessment of changes in developing practices in families, we can esteem the dynamics of the number of search queries, which reflect the interest of Internet users in ways of organizing developmental activities with children at home. In this part of the study, it was not possible to demarcate developing activities with children of different age groups. However, highly likely that, in general, such requests were fulfilled by parents of children of preschool and junior school age, since schoolchildren of middle level, as a rule, have their own devices at their disposal and do not ask a search query that would show the techniques of developing activities with children. The choice of search queries was made by the logic of the correspondence of the types of activities to the previously identified spheres: physical activity, creativity, and intellectual development. The keywords formulated according to the scheme: "[activity] with/for children" for example, "crafts + for children."

The number of search queries related to the organization of activities aimed at physical development grew in April, while in April 2019 at this time of year the interest was quite low (Fig. 1). Traditionally, the growth in the number of searches for these keywords occurs in September. Obviously, at this time, parents are looking for sports schools and sections for children at the beginning of the school year. The last increase in requests recorded by the "Wordstat" Yandex service occurred at the end of March with a peak in April, and in time coincides with the period of strict quarantine.

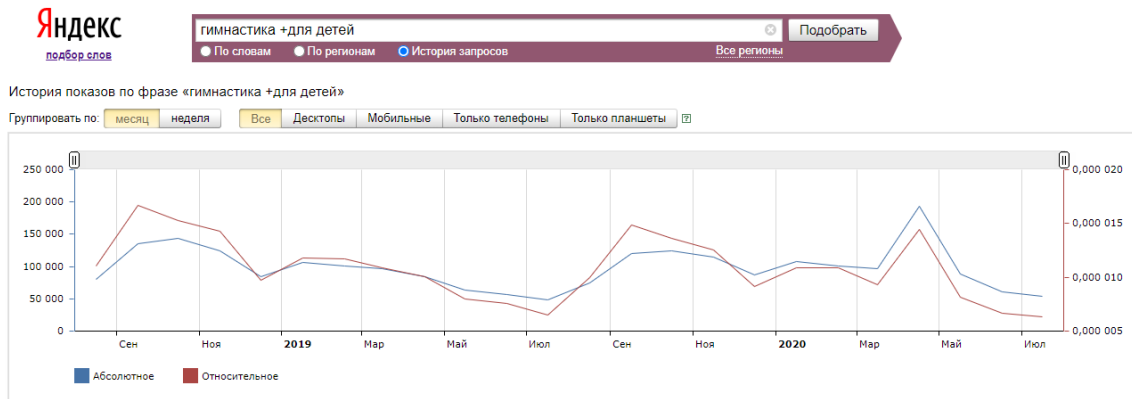


Figure 1 Dynamics of absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies on request "gymnastics + for children"

In the sphere of creativity, the dynamics tested for the requests "crafts + for children" (Fig. 2), "drawing + for children" (Fig. 3). In both cases, clear spikes are recorded that coincide in time with each other. Sharp increases also

occur at the end of March and peaks in April, which again corresponds to the quarantine period.

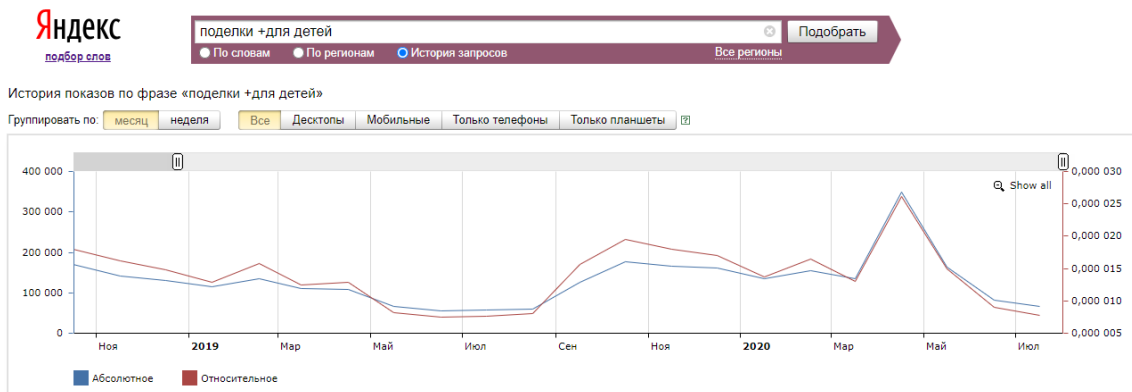


Figure 2 Dynamics of absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies for the request "crafts + for children"

The number of searches for "handicrafts with children" in April 2020 (348,921) is more than three times higher than the number of similar requests in April 2019 (108,555) and 2.6 times higher than the indicator immediately before the quarantine (135,053). Interest in children's drawing generally showed an upward trend in 2020, but rapidly

increased during the quarantine. The peak in April (278,562) is 2.2 times higher than in March (124,729) and four times higher than the same indicator for the number of search queries in April 2019 (69,667).

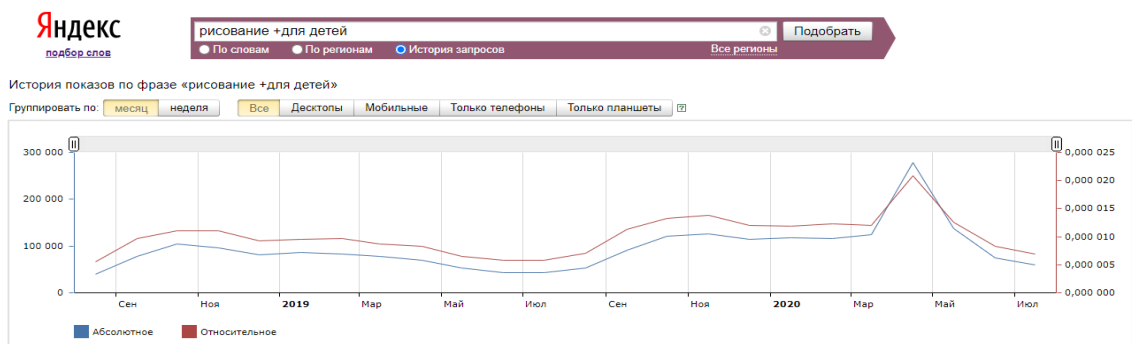


Figure 3 Dynamics of absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies for the request "drawing + for children"

As an example of classes aimed at intellectual development, was taken the query "science + children" (in this case, the statistical service offered this very optimized

formulation) and "teaching children". The request for "teaching children" (Fig. 4) is more general while the request related to the interest in presenting children with

scientific knowledge (Fig.5) demonstrates to a greater extent to expand their horizons and go beyond the

obligatory school material.



Figure 4 Dynamics of the absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies for the request "teaching children"

The graphs again show a sharp increase in the number of user searches, falling at the end of March (the beginning of quarantine) with a peak in April. The interest in teaching children among users of the Yandex search engine in April

2020 (668,155) was 1.7 higher than in March 2020 (388,874) and 2.4 higher than in April 2019.

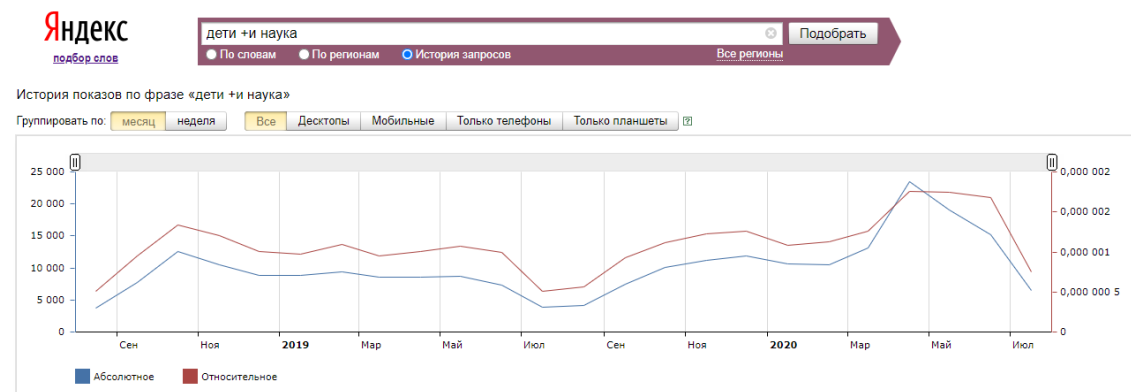


Figure 5 Dynamics of the absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies for the request "children + and science"

A small proportion of parents are involved in additional development of knowledge, as shown by the earlier RLMS monitoring data. The search query rate illustrates this trend, as well. However, here too, one can see expressive dynamics in the period of our interest. The peak number of searches for "children + and science" in April in 2020 (23,425) is almost two times higher than in March 2020 (13,108) and 2.8 times higher than in April 2019 (8,511). Finally, the dynamics of the most generalized in the context of our topic search query "developmental activities + for children" (Fig. 6) reflects the intensification of interest in the period from late March and with a peak in

April. The regular dynamics of this search query, as in the case of the searching about gymnastics for children, has a notable seasonality with growth in September, that is, at the beginning of the school year, when parents decide to choose an institution of additional education. However, an increase in requests in April (with educational and leisure centers closed for quarantine) is not typical and indicates that parents were unusually active in searching for information on organizing developmental activities for children on their own.

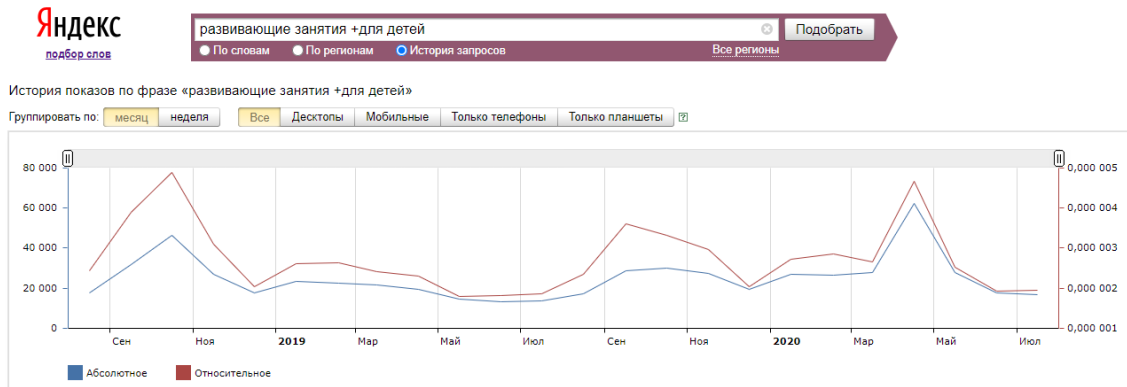


Figure 6 Dynamics of the absolute (blue line) and relative (red line) frequencies for the request " "developmental activities + for children"

Subsequently, there is a significant decrease in the indicators of the number of all search queries about developing activities with children, which can be interpreted in different ways. However, it should not be overlooked that the lowest rates occur during the summer months of children's vacations, moving out of cities, and spending time outside. Low rates of this parameter are also demonstrated by the data for the summer months of 2019, as can be seen in the graphs.

Besides the dynamics of the number of search queries, we have at our disposal the results of a survey on the pastime of parents with children in self-isolation mode, presented at the beginning of July 2020 by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) [7]. The data refer only to the interaction of parents and children from 7 years old, that is, with certain assumptions, they can be compared with the RLMS pre-quarantine data for schoolchildren.

The study revealed that parents of all minor children (32% of all Russians) noted changes in communication with children due to the transition to self-isolation. They began to spend more time with children (14%), communicate more with them (11%). More attention was paid to the study of their children (6%). However, more than half of the parents did not notice any changes in communication with their children (61%).

The shares of those parents who began to spend more time with their children due to self-isolation (48%), and those who spend as much time with them as before (46%), almost equally divided. The most common activities with children in self-isolation are housekeeping or dacha holding (47%), doing school assignments (45%), watching TV, or listening to the radio together (33%), as well as playing games together (computer or board games) - 33%. Many parents cook with their children (29%). Comparing the results of the two surveys collected by different organizations should assume some degree of measurement error. However, significant similarities in the formulation of questions make it possible to carry out such comparisons and to fix some trends taking into account the influence of differences in methods.

During the period of self-isolation 29% of parents, according to the VCIOM survey, read books with children,

and 28% were engaged in additional children's education. It can attribute to the field of intellectual development. Joint sports activities were reported by 21% of the respondents. Joint hobby activities that, in the above formulation, may correspond to the previously identified creative pursuits, said 20% of the respondents. Another 10% answered that they listen to music with their children. This activity can be regarded as a part of creative development (perception of musical art).

Considering that a large share of parents deals with more than one child, we should probably assume that VCIOM statistics cover a higher number of children than the figures show. And still, these figures are higher than we have in monitoring especially, in spheres of intellectual development and creativity.

4. DISCUSSION

In their research, the United Nations Children's Fund draws attention to the complexities of daily interaction between children and parents due to the lack of time for communication. It leads to both deprivations of children's needs and parental stress. During the quarantine, the stress in the communication of children and parents raised: constant co-presence against the background of the parents performing work duties in the format of remote work from home had negative consequences [13]. However, according to VCIOM, among Russians, only 3% noted an increase in tension in communication.

From the number of open nationally representative data, RLMS monitoring allows the most detailed study of the structure of interaction between children and parents and the place of developmental activities in it. A comparison of pre-quarantine and quarantine patterns in this area was carried out using other data sources with comparable parameters.

However, it is worth noting that in addition to short-term changes that manifested themselves directly during the period of strict quarantine, it is interesting whether the practice of developing activities with children among parents will change in the long term. Whether raising awareness in the field of developmental activities will

serve as an impetus for the development of these activities in the home environment, whether they will leave a long trail of habits developed during the quarantine. The results of the 2020 RLMS monitoring will be of great interest to assess such impacts. They will reflect long-term trends and show the situation, not at the time of strict quarantine measures, but trends that continued after the lifting of quarantine restrictions.

Note that the restructuring of everyday life, which requires, first of all, a fresh look at family relationships, bring a positive attitude to the life of Russians. According to the data of VCIOM the index of happiness of Russians for April 2020, the time of the most stringent measures, did not fall in comparison with the pre-quarantine months and amounted to 67 points, which is even 3 points higher than six months ago, in November 2019, although lower than the usual April indicators of 2017-2019. The April Happiness Index in recent years has fluctuated slightly higher: 73 points in April 2017 and 75 points in April 2019. But the main thing in terms of changes in family everyday interaction practices is that family and children are consistently the main basis for feeling happiness [14].

5. CONCLUSIONS

By spending more time with their children, parents more than ever had to take on the role of educators. Before the pandemic, the interaction of children and parents in a large proportion of families could have been like predominantly leisure activities, and classes on intellectual, creative, and physical development were provided to a greater extent by preschool and school institutions and centers of additional education. The quarantine situation left almost no chance for parents to stay away from pedagogy.

Based on the data, we can say that the developing activities of parents with children before quarantine were characterized by low rates. In some families, there was no time for developing activities for children for several reasons. In some families, the development of intellectual, creative, and physical abilities was resolved through outsourcing - by educational institutions, centers of additional education, or by the efforts of older relatives living separately.

During the quarantine period, based on the self-esteem of Russians and on behavioral practices (active search for information on developing activities with children), an increase in the activation of intra-family practices of physical education, creativity, and training can be recorded.

Probably, the parents of preschoolers have better developed pedagogical skills and special techniques to a greater extent and will continue to work with children after the abolition of quarantine.

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