

A Parent Guide: Support Your Child During Virtual Learning

Best practices designed to help parents support their children when virtual learning is implemented in their school



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Virtual learning comes in all shapes and sizes, but the one thing every variety has in common is the need for parental support to amplify success. If school closures challenged you to become your child's teacher overnight, you have likely already found out that the added pressure and competing demands on your time might be overwhelming. Whether you may be playing the role of educator for a short period of time or are continuing as a more long-term learning guide, this resource unpacks eight challenges you may be facing and accompanies them with best practices to help you facilitate learning successfully.

Table of Contents:

Parent Tip #1: Invest in Improving the Teacher-Family Partnership

Parent Tip #2: Find the Sweet Spot for Amount of Learning Time

Parent Tip #3: Use Intentional Breaks to Improve Learning

Parent Tip #4: Learn to Look at Screen Time Differently

Parent Tip #5: Establish Routine and Predictability

Parent Tip #6: Learn the Basics of Effective Instruction

Parent Tip #7: Incorporate Rewards

Parent Tip #8: Give Yourself Grace



Parent Tip #1: Invest in Improving the Teacher-Family Partnership



Challenge

Misalignment between school expectations and parent capabilities

We've always known that the relationship between teacher and parent is important. But, while students are learning from home with you playing an expanded role in their learning, that partnership becomes mission critical.

Consider these tips as you determine how to build a stronger rapport with your child's teacher, and seek solutions that best match the needs of your child.



Reach out to clarify expectations for your child's at-home learning.



Ask for support if you are struggling with the programs and technology your child is expected to use.



Clarify any limitations your household has with access to the Internet and devices during appropriate learning times.



Work with teachers to understand schedules and communication preferences so that you know the best ways to connect with each other.

As always, you are your child's best advocate. Educators are stepping up and getting creative, but they can't provide innovative solutions without a clear understanding of where your and your child's needs stand. Consider these hang-ups and possible workarounds:



Internet access is a problem



See if printable worksheets can be arranged via a designated pickup spot.



Scheduling conflict for video lessons



Find out if there are other times that live lessons may be offered or if there are open office hours for one-on-one conferencing.

Parent Tip #2: Find the Sweet Spot for Amount of Learning Time



Competing demands between work and home

Amount of Sustained Learning Time

Structured learning activities should take the developmental age of the child into consideration. The amount of sustained learning time that a 4-year-old needs is quite different from that of a 14-year-old. At school, learning is separated by regular breaks, including lunch, recess, and passing periods. While there are no hard-and-fast rules, consider these general guidelines:



**3–5 years old
(Pre-K–K)**

15–20 Minutes



**6–8 years old
(Grades 1–3)**

About 30 Minutes



**9–13 years old
(Grades 4–8)**

About 45 Minutes



High School

About an Hour

Total Amount of Daily Online Instruction Time

Even after you master these different bursts of learning time, you might still be asking how much total time students should be spending. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards indicates that the amount of online learning should differ for elementary and secondary students.



**Elementary
School Students**



**Middle
School Students**



**High School
Students**

Parent Tip #3: Use Intentional Breaks to Improve Learning



Students struggle to maintain focus or pay attention

Allow for student-led choices for break times to help “push the reset button” at timed intervals or when a specific task is completed. This doesn’t mean that a child’s brain is idle during this time; rather, the child is doing the hard work of processing memories and experiences. Additionally, brain breaks can help channel a child’s endless energy into the academic activities of the day.



10-minute breaks for younger children:

- Jumping, running, dancing
- Playing with a pet
- Reading with a friend or family member
- Coloring or small crafts
- Hands-on activity, such as a puzzle or modeling clay

10-minute breaks for tweens and teens:

- Chatting with a friend
- Stretching or yoga
- Walking outside
- Cooking or preparing a snack
- Drawing or painting



Parent Tip #4: Learn to Look at Screen Time Differently



Challenge

Harmful effects of too much screen time

Increased screen time as a result of learning at home is leading many parents to recognize that not all screen time is created equally. In short, content and context matter. As you evaluate your child's screen time, it helps to shift the focus to monitoring how the device is used rather than how much.

Video chats with family members, educational software, and virtual story time are all examples of world-extending screen uses. Gaming and social media use, on the other hand, are examples of entertainment. They both can have a place in your child's life (if your child is of the appropriate age), but they should not take up too much time. Acknowledge the generational divide that may exist—these examples of social interaction are critical for your children.

Chip Donohue, the founding director of the Technology in Early Childhood Center at Erikson Institute, offers this guidance:



Relationships matter most.

Encourage the use of software as a means to form connections—to teachers, to family, to each other. Educational software should exist in an ecosystem in which students talk about, extend, and apply their online learning.



Proper pedagogy complements technology tools.

Don't think simply of what educational technology "delivers" to your children but of how they use it to make or create something. That's learning!



Technology-mediated family engagement works.

How can technology connect your child to "family" (like grandparents or even close friends)? Think about learning allies who you have not yet engaged as partners in your child's learning.



Parent Tip #5: Establish Routine and Predictability



Students are unsure of what they should be working on and when

Learning thrives when accompanied by routine and schedule. If you've been operating in an unscheduled universe, you and your children are probably experiencing a lot of anxiety and frustration. Explore these tips for establishing a learning routine:

1

Write it down.

Not only does writing out a schedule establish accountability for all parties, but it also brings clarity to an otherwise nebulous situation.

2

Prioritize your nonnegotiable commitments.

Do you have learning allies (such as grandparents, siblings, or childcare) who can help fill the gap? Can you block time in your schedule and use flexible hours to support your child?

3

Determine what goes into your schedule.

Incorporate such important items as:

- School-sponsored check-ins with teacher
- Blocks of family availability
- Times for independent structured learning activities (with software or print materials)
- Breaks
- Movement
- Eating times
- Social time

4

Weigh your options between a set schedule versus a checklist.

If a prescribed schedule is not working for your child, consider creating a checklist of "must do" and "may do" activities.

5

Make it a partnership.

Work on a schedule with your child. Particularly if you are parenting a teen or tween, buy-in is essential.

6

Set up easy monitoring.

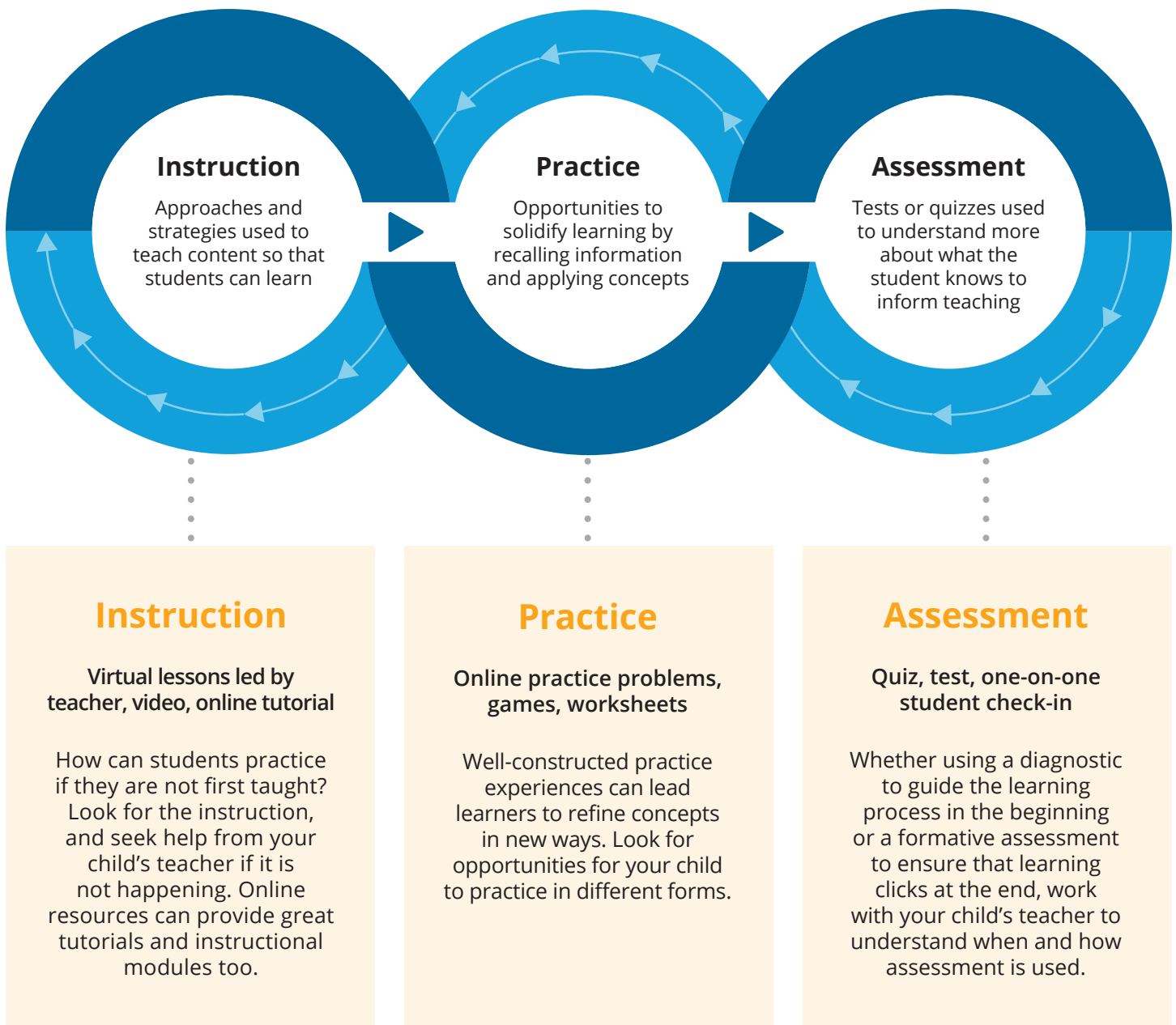
Assign stations in them home for each activity, such that students can get up and move and you can easily monitor that learning stays on track.

Parent Tip #6: Learn the Basics of Effective Instruction



Parents don't feel prepared to serve as learning guides

As a learning facilitator, keeping the basic cycle of instruction in balance is critical. Here's a crash course in how instruction, practice, and assessment all work together.



Parent Tip #7: Incorporate Rewards



Students lack motivation

Do you feel like you could use your own reward chart that rewards you as the parent for remembering that positive discipline works better than negative discipline? It is common to experience those days when you have simply run out of things to take away. Instead, focus on rewarding good behavior and redirecting problematic behavior. Why?—because it works, and research has documented the results.

Incentivize your child's learning behavior with rewarding things that your child values rather than taking away privileges. It might be a new book, a coveted video game, or simply a movie date with Dad. If you design rewards with your child, you might be surprised what your child comes up with.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Sam								
Lydia								



Here are just a few ideas to get you started:

- Quality time doing a special activity together
- Praise, sticker charts, certificates
- Choose the dinner menu or a special treat
- Free time: such as complete the week's schoolwork by Thursday and get a free day on Friday
- Watch a movie or show of your child's choosing
- Use of special supplies: markers, glitter, stamps, etc.
- Receive a plant or seeds to start or add to a garden
- Prizes to promote physical activity: Frisbee, Hula Hoop, jump rope, sidewalk chalk

Parent Tip #8: Give Yourself Grace



Parent(s) feeling stressed or overwhelmed

Let's all give ourselves—and each other—a little grace. Parents won't do a perfect job as stand-in teachers. Children won't do a perfect job as at-home learners. Educators won't have perfect home-based lesson plans. But, we're all in this together. Achievable plans are better than perfect ones. Be good to yourself, and be good to others. Regularly check in on your own social-emotional health, and separate what you can and cannot control during times of stress.

