



Distance Learning Tips for Families | Dept. of Student Services

Important Note for all Families

This is a challenging time for students, families, and school staff. You may be trying to work from home or balancing other family needs while trying to support your child with distance learning. Please remember, this is not your typical job and it's okay to have days that feel less than successful. The best thing you can do for your children is to help them feel safe and loved in this uncertain time.



General Behavior Management Tools

Allow children to make some choices. When we have choices, we feel like we have some control and that's really important when things are different or scary. Types of choices could include the order of activities for the day (should we do reading or math first), what to have for breakfast (do you want cereal or oatmeal), what the movement activity could look like (do you want to do yoga or go outside), and/or what chore to complete (do you want to put away the dishes or sweep the floor).

Try to give 5 positive comments for every correction or reminder you give. This helps improve everybody's mood. You can praise students for starting assignments, cleaning up the dishes, waking up on time, helping a sibling, etc.

Remember students do not have to sit at a table in order to learn. Pillows, a floor space, lying on the couch, or even a yoga ball might help them focus & feel comfortable.



"Working, parenting, and teaching are three different jobs that cannot be done at the same time. It's not hard because you are doing it wrong. It's hard because it's too much. Do the best you can." - Dr. Emily W. King, Ph.D, Psychologist

Concerns with Attention Span or Activity Level

Create a daily visual schedule to help children understand the expectations and the plan for the day

Give directions in one-step chunks. Providing one task or activity to complete at a time can help your child focus on what needs to be completed now, without getting overwhelmed.

Some children have difficulty ignoring distractions such as noises in the room or materials on the table, so it may be helpful to provide only the items needed to complete the task for schoolwork.

Some children benefit from things like stress balls, bean bags, flat marbles, or Velcro to fidget with when doing schoolwork.

Specific Learning Challenges

Reading:

Encourage your child to read aloud to stuffed animals or younger siblings to help improve fluency.

The use of a plain notecard can be used as a reading guide. This simple tool allows students to cover up everything below the line they are reading.

Include movement breaks into the daily routine. Some examples include: 10 jumping jacks, dance to a favorite song, run a lap around the house, go up and down the stairs 5 times, etc.

Use a timer to provide limits for work completion. This may help your child focus on the specific activity without thinking about what else needs to be completed.

If distractions are a challenge, make a study carrel from an old cardboard box. Follow the link for an example:
<https://www.parents.com/kids/education/homework/kids-organization/>

Music has been found to have a positive impact on productivity and concentration. Try playing music with 50-80 beats per minute in the background, such as classical music, nature sounds, or video game music (without the visuals). This strategy may also help adults focus and be productive, too!

Provide sticky notes or scraps of paper for children to jot down important events or thoughts when reading. It may be helpful to encourage them to stop every few pages or at the end of each chapter to write the main ideas.

To improve sight word recognition use a “Drill Sandwich” in which known (K) and unknown (U) words are written on index cards and presented to the student. To construct a drill sandwich, 7 known words and 3 unknown words from a class text, or passage should be presented in this order (K-K-K-U-K-K-U-K-K-U). When unknown words become known they can be replaced with new unknown words maintaining the ratio of 70% known to 30% unknown.

Math:

Provide items such as beans or cereal to help make problem-solving more concrete.

Before starting a word problem, have your child point out keywords that tell them what operation to use.

Specific Learning Challenges

Writing:

Have your child speak their answers out loud and have them written down by someone else. They can then copy all or part of that answer in their own writing.

Children who struggle with writing may enjoy using a marker or special pen to practice.

Feeling Anxious

Use a daily visual schedule. When your child can see what is coming and knows what to expect, the fear of the unknown decreases. A "change card" can also be made and added to the schedule which would signal that a change is coming.

The use of deep breathing techniques can help children calm feelings of anxiety. Try 4-7-8 breathing: breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, breathe out for 8 counts.

Using a simple to-do list with sticky notes for each task can be a good reminder and provide choice:



A piece of wide-ruled lined paper can be turned sideways so the lines run vertically to help children keep numbers in order by ones, tens, hundreds.

If the program times-out while your child is completing a writing assignment, pause the program and draft the assignment in Word or Google Docs. Then they can copy and paste their draft into the online program.

Children look to parents and other caregiving adults to guide reactions. Managing your own anxiety helps children manage theirs.

Conscious Discipline breathing techniques have been taught to many students at school. Some of the techniques your child may have been introduced to include:

S.T.A.R. breathing - children are encouraged to Smile, Take a Deep Breath, And Relax

Drain - children stretch out their arms and pretend they are faucets. They will then tighten each part of their arms and face, breathe out making a "shhh" sound, and release the tension

Balloon – children put their hands on top of their heads and breathe in while raising their hands, similar to inflating a balloon. They will then breathe out and move their hands back to their head, deflating the balloon

It may be helpful to limit social media and news coverage of current events to reduce feelings of anxiety.

Feeling Sad or Depressed

Mindfulness techniques, or becoming aware of the present moment, can help relieve feelings of extreme sadness or depression. Some examples include breathing exercises, nature walks, talking about things they are grateful for, and/or paying attention to their pulse and heartbeat.

Personal hygiene activities should also be part of a daily schedule. Children should be encouraged to wake up at a certain time, bathe daily, and brush their teeth to help set them up for a productive day.

Children may use play or creative activities to show their feelings. Offer children time to draw, paint, tell stories, and ask them to talk about their work.

Handling Change

Talk about the positive aspects of being at home and develop short term goals to help children adjust to unexpected changes.

Missing Friends & Family

Help your child find ways to connect with others such as through video chats, e-mails, and/or pen pal letters.

Trouble Beginning or Completing Tasks

Alarms or timers can help cue children that it is time to "start" an activity as well as signal the end of the work time.

Start by thinking of an activity that is fun for the child (playing a family game, free play time, play-doh) and set a goal such as 15 minutes of language arts or math work. After they work for the time block, give the fun break and then set a new work goal.

Daily exercise can help with feelings of sadness. This activity can be included in your visual schedule.

Let your children know that it is ok to show their feelings. Allow them to see adults talking through strategies they are using to help cope with all of the recent changes. This will allow them to begin to develop skills of their own.

Create a safe environment by using visual cues for routines and schedules. It can be helpful to highlight changes to the routine, and teach strategies (i.e, breathing techniques, drawing, taking a motor break) to adjust to those changes.

Regular check-ins with family members can be part of the new routine. For example, your child could review lessons learned during the day, during evening chats with grandparents or other special people.

Organize tasks so that the favorite or easiest ones are completed first. This can help children feel successful so they are ready to tackle harder tasks.

It may help to do the first item in an activity with your child. This will allow them to ask questions, ensure they understand the task, and build confidence.

Frustration

Using a quieter tone of voice when children get frustrated, even whispering, can help them calm down.

It's okay to take a short break if your child is getting frustrated. After the break is over, encourage the child to ask for help or talk through the problem.

It can be helpful for children to hear adults working through their own frustration. By hearing you talk aloud through a situation, they will be able to observe an appropriate emotional model. For example, "I'm frustrated that the toys have not been put away, I'm going to take some deep breaths to calm down" or "Oops I forgot to charge the computer for work. That's ok, I can plug it in now."

Sleep Troubles

Good sleep starts with a routine. This can be 3-4 activities such as taking a bath or shower, reading, quietly talking with a family member, etc.

The following recommendations are based on a 2014 National Sleep Survey:

Age Group	Years	Sleep Needed
Infants	3-12 months	14-15 hours
Toddlers	1-3 years	12-14 hours
Preschoolers	3-5 years	11-13 hours
School-Age	6-12 years	10-11 hours
Adolescents	12-18 years	8.5-9.5 hours

Work on the first problem together. Then, watch them do the next task on their own to make sure they understand the directions.

Children can be asked if they would like to move on to a different subject or get help to work through their frustration. It is important to go back to the frustrating task later if assignments are switched.

Other good sleep habits include limiting caffeine close to bedtime, removing electronic devices from student's bedrooms, and keeping the same routine on the weekends.

For other problem-solving ideas, please contact your school psychologist.