

Learning *at Home*

Helping School Children & Families Adapt to Time at Home

As schools close, children who are normally in school all day are home with no structured lessons, self-paced assignments, or perhaps a more formal virtual school program to attend individually. This change will take some adjustment for everyone. Here are some suggestions to smooth this transition.

Tips for Learning at Home

- ▶ **Keep realistic expectations.** Children and adults are experiencing a major life shift. Business will not go on as usual. Be flexible and adjust your schedule as necessary. Work together to find creative solutions to your new norm.
- ▶ **Make relationships your first priority.** More than ever, children need reassurance and comfort. What works in a school setting rarely works at home because you are your child's parent, not a teacher. Start with comfort, joy of learning, and togetherness. Build your day around those ideas. Spend a few minutes playing or reading with children first thing in the morning. If you "fill their cups" first, the entire day often runs more smoothly.
- ▶ **Get organized.** Do some planning and preparation to organize workspaces, set routines, and establish ground rules. Depending on your child's age and ability, your child might need a little support — or more than a little. Revisit your plans after a few days and adjust them if necessary. Your workspace might be individual desks, a home office, or even the kitchen table.
- ▶ **Create a routine.** Stick to a consistent wake-up time. Some schools mandate a particular check-in time, some do not. Select a start time and stick to it during the "school" week. Get dressed, make beds, brush teeth, and do chores. To set the start of the school day, consider creating a mock commute. If safe, walk outside together and back inside to mark the transition from home to "school." Or create a new transition. Maintain evening bedtime routines, too. Children might balk at these routines, but they're important because they offer a sense of comfort and normalcy. It can help if you allow them to participate in some of the planning.
- ▶ **Use time strategically.** Meals are ideal times for casual learning and conversation. Gather at breakfast and discuss each person's plan for the day. With children, write out a simple schedule. Breakfast can also be a good time to do some of the learning together. Read together, have interesting discussions, or talk about potential challenges and solutions. Remember, as your children's parent, you have a relationship that is your strongest asset. Be warm, positive, and encouraging, and keep learning enjoyable. Depending on your school's policies, it might be possible to combine some of your children's learning. For example, perhaps you can read a book about history or science together, read poetry, or study a work of art. Think about the one-room schoolhouse when teachers worked with multiple age groups, combining subjects as a matter of necessity.

- ▶ **Take frequent breaks.** Set specific times for outdoor exposure and exercise. At a minimum get up and move at least every 40 minutes. Create special routines and rituals throughout the day that build connection. Consider creating a family tea time, or perhaps you take a break in the afternoon to play a game, read a book together, and have a snack. Allow your child time to rest and reset as they would after school. Discuss a plan for how homework is going to be handled. Some schools may assign work for the whole day, while others may assign day work as well as homework.
- ▶ **Explore children's interests.** If children complete their schoolwork earlier in the day, use afternoons for projects, reading, or play. If your child is typically involved in afterschool arts, sports, or other activities, find a way to allow them to re-create that experience at home. Many providers are finding ways to use video chat to continue music lessons and other meetings. Think about the learning that happens through everyday family routines, such as gardening or baking. Use this time to work together as a family on projects.
- ▶ **Engage children in daily tasks.** Teach life skills like doing laundry, cooking, or managing finances. Start with small tasks such as sorting clothes or clearing dishes. Recognize that children may execute the task differently than you, but over time they will learn something new and will become more skilled and helpful. As they do, gradually increase responsibility.
- ▶ **Avoid social isolation.** Consider ways to nurture and support extended family members and neighbors. Use video chat to stay in contact with friends and family. If your community allows, perhaps your family can run errands or pick up food for someone who is shut in. Start a virtual book club or write letters.
- ▶ **Be patient with yourself and your children.** You're going to have hard days. When frustration builds, pause momentarily and do something fun. Turn on some music, go to the park, snuggle with a book, or bake a special treat. Expect some conflict as you become accustomed to being home together more. Talk with children about conflict resolution and encourage them to take breaks for time alone.
- ▶ **Include technology as a solution.** For children who are accustomed to spending their days among friends and schoolmates, it is important to help them keep connected. Phones, computers, video chatting, and social media are all ways children interact with each other. Together with your child, create guidelines as to when and how they use these vehicles. Build from your existing household rules, but make adjustment as needed to provide the connection children need while being physically separated from their peers. Consider these questions: Will phones be allowed in a child's bedroom? How will media be managed during home-based school assignments? What are realistic time limits for you and your child? What requires parental approval, such as a movie rental or app purchase?

Tips for Working from Home

- ▶ **Set realistic expectations.** Talk with your children about specific times when you are not available. Come up with a plan for what children can do if they have a problem or need help. If they are stuck on a school assignment, for example, they can move on to something else until you are available. Older children can help younger siblings, or perhaps a grandparent, relative, or neighbor can help via FaceTime or telephone.
- ▶ **Encourage age-appropriate independence.** Young children will need support throughout the day, but elementary-age children can make simple snacks, complete self-care, and help with household tasks. Express appreciation for children's contributions to the family.
- ▶ **Tackle problems as a family.** Work together to find solutions and become more efficient. For example, set up a lunch-making station and ask older children to make lunch. Stock a box in the pantry with less-perishable lunch items such as bread, crackers, and dried fruit. Stock a similar box in the fridge with fruit, cut veggies, yogurt, hummus, cheese sticks, or deli meat. Make a sign that lists the elements of a healthy lunch, e.g., one grain, one protein, one fruit, and one vegetable, so children can easily gather lunch items from the boxes.
- ▶ **Corral the chaos.** With everyone home, messes are going to build much more quickly. Develop a plan to keep the household running smoothly. Teach children to put things away when they're done. Tidy up the house a few times during the day. Make a weekly meal plan and start dinner prep in the morning.
- ▶ **Think creatively about your work schedule.** Depending on your job, you might be able to work a few hours early in the morning or late in the evening. Phone calls are often the most difficult aspect of working at home. Try to group phone calls together in one- or two-hour blocks when children know you aren't available. Take advantage of time differences when possible. For example, if you're on the West Coast, call East Coasters early in the morning. Remember, we all need to take time to care for ourselves and regroup. For all of us this is uncharted territory. Consider taking a few minutes each hour for self-care — sip a cup of tea, listen to a favorite song, talk to a friend, stretch and move, or do whatever nourishes you.



Example Family Schedule

	Wake/get ready for day
	Breakfast
	Discuss/write down plan for day
	Periods of school and work rotated with movement
	Lunch
	Periods of school and work rotated with movement and time outside
	End of official school day
	Child-selected extracurricular activity
	Relax
	Homework
	Family time: telephone or video chat with relatives together
	Dinner: spend some time discussing day and making adjustment as needed
	Relax/bed