

Distance Learning

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Many parents are concerned about their children's education during the pandemic. Teachers go to school for years to be able to do their job, and when parents have their own job responsibilities, how can they meet the needs of their kids' learning? Will kids fall behind? What if they have special needs? Luckily, distance learning has existed for a long time and we can learn a lot from professionals and organizations who have been offering these services. As long as we are **dedicated, persistent, and treat one another with compassion**, we can help students get the most out of new learning opportunities.



Environment

aka, The Home Classroom

- If your child's teacher has requested certain supplies, make sure those are **available and organized**. These should be easily within your child's reach, not something they need you to monitor for them.
- **Reduce distractions** – pets in a different room, no TV or other devices, parents should take calls in a different room. However, it might be helpful to let kids draw or color while they're listening to a distance learning lecture (just avoid digital media or other engrossing activities).



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- Make sure your child's desk and chair are **comfortable**. If they're reaching all day or sitting on an uncomfortable seat, they are more likely to be distracted or get upset.
- It's ok if your child **works better on the floor or standing up**, rather than a desk or a table. *Discourage doing classwork on their bed*, which may interfere with sleep.
- **Breaks are important** for students of all ages (up to adults!). Provided it doesn't interrupt the teaching schedule, give kids regular breaks after work periods. This should be on a *predictable schedule*, like 15 minutes of work to 5 minutes of break, or 25 minutes of work to 10 minutes of break.
- **Create visual schedules** that are easy to see from your child's workspace. This helps students know what to expect in their day, provides structure, and may even help them persist in hard tasks if they know preferred activities are coming up soon.

Personal Needs and Doing the Work

Students

- **Get a good night's sleep.** Go to bed on time, wake up with plenty of time to get ready.
- **Eat a good breakfast**, snacks, and lunch at normal times during the day.
- **Start your day at the same time every day.** This may or may not be the same time as your first class. Because sleep cycles of teenagers naturally shift later, teens may need to start later in the morning to make sure they are sleeping enough (e.g., 9am).
- **Get exercise** after school (or before if you get up early enough!) – it helps you feel less stressed and uncomfortable during the school day.
- **Use your breaks!** Get fresh air, drink some water, run around the yard, do something that relaxes you.
- **Work on something every day.** This will work best if you have a routine, like math for an hour every day from 10am-11am, reading for English from 11am-11:30am, etc. It helps you anticipate what is coming next, carves out

time to get projects and assignments done, and encourages you to take a break from it after you have put in enough time in one day.

- **Be flexible.** It's ok to work more one day and less the next. Even adults have days where they feel like they don't get a lot done. It's normal. Talk to your teacher or your parent if you're falling behind and need help catching up.

Parents

- Be **supportive** and **positive**.
- **Keep your stress down**, take care of yourself.
- Make learning **fun** if you can, but don't feel like you need to be the teacher.
- **Help** as you normally would with homework.
- Encourage your child to **ask questions** during class as they normally would.
- **Balance the day** so that your child has fun, relaxing things to look forward to.
- Make preferred activities available after a reasonable, attainable amount of work is done. Talk to your child's teacher about what should be expected of them each day. Distance learning differs from in-person classes.
- **Encourage extracurricular activities** as much as possible. This may include setting up videoconferencing with your child's friends so they might all work on homework together (and it's ok if they don't get too much done!).
- Be flexible. It's ok if everything doesn't go to plan. Model patience and problem solving for your child.





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Technology

- If possible, *turn on blue light filtering or reduce the brightness of the screen*. This reduces eye strain.
- *Make sure the wifi is strong*. Connect their computer directly with an ethernet cable to the modem if possible.
- Headphones and cameras should provide *clear audio and visual input*. Headphones that produce static will be distracting or may even hurt your child's ears.
- *Turn off your view of your own camera*. People are easily distracted by their own images and may distract themselves from listening or participating.
- **Be flexible**. Technology crashes and unexpected issues arise. The priority for your child's education is learning and becoming a good citizen; they can do that with their books at home, in the backyard, and interacting with family members, too. Make sure you have a plan for the days when technology is unreliable: packets, books, projects, etc.
- *Write login names and passwords on a small index card and tape it to the computer or desk so your child can avoid delays in logging in.*

Special Needs

- If your child has a 504 or IEP, their teachers will have recommendations to help them access distance learning classes to the fullest extent. **Be clear on your child's goals.**
- Some easy accommodations include:
 - Headphones can reduce distractions and improve focus.
 - Increase print size on screen (hit control/command and +). This can support eyesight and make reading easier.
 - *Use subtitles* if available. Some children have an easier time with comprehension if they can read the words as they hear them.



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- Encourage video recording of lessons so your child can re-watch them later. Some teachers may already be doing this.
- Work with your child's teacher to establish a schedule of classes and due dates to help your child stay on track.
- **Encourage multimodal learning.** If your child gets stuck with something, draw a picture of it, find a way to apply it practically, or find different ways to explain it (YouTube has a wealth of resources, if you help your child cultivate them!).
- Have **hands-on activities**, such as items to count or group for math. Talk to your child's teacher for more ideas relevant to their lessons.
- Children with Autism should still be encouraged to interact with their peers. Work with other parents and/or the teacher to organize interactive activities.
- Reduce stimulation if your child is easily overwhelmed. Reduce brightness on the screen, lower the volume on the computer, close curtains partway.

Resources

Many teachers and schools have a variety of recommended resources. Ask for advice from the teacher and make their recommendations available to your children!

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/dl/>

<https://careerwise.minnstate.edu/education/successonline.html>

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-improve-distance-learning-students-ieps>

<https://medium.com/@emilycherkin/minimize-the-misery-five-ways-to-help-your-kids-survive-remote-learning-9914b353d228>