

Primary Behaviour Support
Supporting Children to Learn at Home
During COVID19

The rapid closure of schools due to the coronavirus has taken many families and schools by surprise. Suddenly, children all over the country are being asked to learn from home, often through online learning, tasks sent via e-mail, or packets sent out by the school. For many, this will be a new experience. It's not easy to convert homes into classrooms. But there are a few things you can do to get ready.

Introduction

Distance learning can be hard for children who learn and think differently. That's especially true for children who struggle with focus. If your child is still learning from home, try to set things up to make it as easy as possible. This can reduce some of the stress.

Look for patterns, too. Some kids may refuse to go to school on certain days or to do certain kinds of work. Maybe your child refuses school on days when the class is taking turns reading out loud. Or shuts down when there's a writing assignment. Maybe at home, similar tasks make him or her shut down.

Parents should share what you're seeing with your child's teacher. Ask if the teacher has noticed similar reactions or has ideas on why your child is refusing to do schoolwork. Teachers seek to make contact with the child and family to talk through the issues.

Encourage open conversation and talk to your child.

"Let's talk about what's happening when it's time for you to go to school...."

"I need your help in understanding why you're so upset about schoolwork."

"Let's talk about what's going to make you feel better about going to school or doing your schoolwork."

For some kids, school refusal is related to anxiety. They may be anxious about their routine changing. They may worry that something is going to happen to a parent or family members. With COVID-19, loved ones may be sick. And kids may be concerned about getting sick themselves.

Kids can be anxious or fearful of other things, too, even when there's no big disruption or upsetting event. So, it's important to know what's typical anxiety and what's not.

Find out from the child which time of day they prefer, learning in the morning might be better for them and shorter sessions may be better as sitting at school for an hour is different to sitting at home.

Helping your child to cope.

Find out effective ways to help your child cope. One of the most important things you can do is to create a safe space for your child to talk.

If your child refuses to do schoolwork or go to school, saying "You can't make me." acknowledge that it's true—you can't make your child go to school. But you can't do much about any consequences, either.

You might say, "You're right. I can't force you. I also can't control how your teacher chooses to consequence."

Then, offer to have an honest and calm conversation about why your child is refusing to do the work or go to school. Make it clear that you want to understand what's going on and help fix the problems. At the same time, make it clear what the expectations are.

Supporting your child to access their schoolwork at home.

1. Create a learning space for your child.

Does your child already have a special place to do homework? It's important to set up a quiet, clutter-free area if your child is learning full-time from home.

For example, you can convert the kitchen table into a learning station. Turn off the TV and remove all cups, salt and pepper, and other kitchen items when your child is doing schoolwork. When it's time to eat, put away the school supplies and use it again as a kitchen table.

Why is it important to clear away the clutter for learning time? Reducing clutter helps kids focus.

2. Make a schedule and stick to it.

We are creatures of habit. With no school bell to make kids get up on time, they might feel like sleeping in. With no set schedule, kids might never get around to schoolwork. Finding time for learning requires planning. Take a look at your family's schedule and figure out the best times for learning. Making a timetable with the child and giving structure to the day, with a reward at the end, can defiantly help. Put in the timetable movement breaks, and snack times, and reward times. Make sessions short to begin with and build it gradually if the child is struggling with their concentration. This leads to the question do they have a good sleep pattern and routine? Try to keep to routines of getting up and going to bed.

Encourage your child to wear their school jumper so it becomes an object of reference for them and in turn changing their mind set that they are at home but working. Controlling snacks is also becoming a parent's nightmare so getting them to prepare their lunch and popping it in the lunch box can limit their snacking and it can be timetabled in.

Here are a few questions to help you and your child come up with a schedule:

Does your child need a lot of help from you to get started? If so, think about when you, another adult, or responsible sibling is available to provide support.

For older children sometimes late afternoon and early evening might be when they're most awake and ready to learn.

Are you building time into your child's schedule for exercise? (Going outside and taking brain breaks can help kids focus and get more done.)

Does your family have any contracts to help kids follow rules at home? Agreeing on when to watch TV or play video games is important when kids are learning full-time at home.

Once you decide when your child will learn, identify that time as school time and stick with it. You can always allow the child to feel a sense of control by giving some choice e.g. a choice of which order they do tasks in.

In summary try to make sure your child:

- gets up and goes to bed at the same time each day
- has regular mealtimes
- has regular breaks
- Has time to be active – children are used to regular play at lunch and break times

3. Reduce distractions.

Video games, computer games, social media, TV, toys, pets—our homes have lots of distractions. Make a list of the things that distract your child. Then, find ways to limit them during learning time.

For example, is the dog a big distraction? If so, can you put the dog in a separate room when your child is doing schoolwork?

Are games or social media a big distraction? Try blocking them on your child's device during instructional time. Another way to eliminate online temptations: After downloading an assignment, turn off the Wi-Fi to help your child focus on the work.

4. Reducing screen time

Digital devices are not the only way to learn. Manage screen time with a timer and break up screen time by getting your child to:

- use books and other printed materials that their school has provided or that you have at home
- write by hand – try asking them to complete work by hand, write a diary, a summary of things they've done each day, 'to do' lists or shopping lists
- be active and get away from the screen regularly – go for a walk, a bike ride, follow a fitness class such as Joe Wicks, or have a dance to some music
- stop using digital devices at least an hour before bed to ensure your child has a good night's sleep

You may also decide to use screen time as an incentive. This is often referred to as a now and next approach. Once your child has completed their task, they may be allowed a set amount of time using technology.

5. Use a calendar and colour-code it.

It's important to set up systems to help your child stay on top of school deadlines. This will help your child stay organized. Post a calendar and mark it with due dates. Help your child plan backwards from the due dates. Use visual organizers to break an assignment down into steps and the specific strategies needed to complete it.

You can also use color-coding for tasks. For example, use a red pen for reading and a blue pen for math.

6. Get plenty of exercise.

Exercise helps us think better. When we move and groove, our problem-solving, memory, and attention improve. Physical activity is a natural way to reduce stress and prevent anxiety. Experts say that when we move and get our heart rate up, it has a positive impact on how we think.

Look for family-friendly workouts you can do at home. Identify a time and place in your home for physical activity. The best time to exercise might be right before tackling schoolwork. It's also good to take exercise breaks throughout the day.

Young children should be active for at least 3 hours a day in total. It's also good to get some fresh air every day. While inside, there are plenty of things you can do to keep children active, such as:

- going for a walk or a bike ride
- playing a game such as hide-and-seek
- making an obstacle course
- playing music and having a dance-off
- following an online fitness class such as Joe Wicks

7. See which accessibility features help your child.

Most phones, laptops, and other mobile devices have built-in assistive technology. For example, read aloud or text-to-speech can help struggling readers, and speech-to-text can help struggling writers.

On YouTube, you can adjust the settings to slow down the playback speed if your child is having trouble understanding videos. You can also change the settings to show closed captions if it helps your child to read the text while listening to videos.

See which features help your child access digital content and select the ones that fit your child's needs and preferences.

8. Reach out to your child's teacher and teachers reach out to the parent/carer

Online education or learning at home requires family support. Some online schools go as far as calling parents "learning coaches." To support your child, set up a direct line of communication between teacher and parent/carer. Use email, text, phone calls, or maybe even video conferencing to connect.

Parents - If you're not sure how to do an assignment, don't just guess—reach out to confirm. You may even want to set up a day and time each week to connect with the teacher. You can use this time to talk about challenges your child is facing, review upcoming instruction, and understand expectations. Being proactive is essential if your child is struggling in school. Perhaps try to connect the child to the teacher too.

9. Look for ways to remove learning barriers.

If your child has learning challenges, it's important for you to review the online and other learning material the school sends out. Here are some questions to consider:

- What options are teachers offering to help struggling readers with written material?
- What options does the child have to demonstrate understanding? For example, if the child has trouble writing, could the child send a video response.
- Does the learning task sent including supports to help kids with things like getting organised, identifying the main idea, and taking notes?

Work with your child's parent/carer to identify and remove any barriers. Remember: If it's a challenge for their child, it's most likely a problem for other students, too.

10. Accessing alternative work when necessary.

If your child is struggling to access the work that is being provided by school, speak to the class teacher and check that it is set for their ability and whether or not they have observed a particular reluctance to engage in certain areas of the curriculum as it may be that your child perceives this as a weakness. You might see if you can come up with an agreement that they will access one or two pieces of schoolwork alongside spending some time on the educational websites that are offering free resources.

For some children they may prefer learning related to self-help skills such as cooking and baking, gardening in warmer weather, nature walks, beach days and topical work linked to something they are particularly interested in. If they are motivated by space for example, give them a project on that. If they are motivated by something and enjoying the topic surely, they will be more engaged. If a child loved a particular video game ask them to find out who created it, what's the background? could they tweet someone to ask questions about it?

Helping the Environment and community are also worthwhile learning challenges. For example, a child could donate to their local food bank by going to the shops to pick some items to donate. Litter picking is another worthwhile environmental challenge. The children get to move and enjoy these tasks while learning about social responsibilities and so on.

Crafts and construction tasks may be more engaging than written learning. E.g. Lego projects - build something topical with Lego etc.

Perhaps set “challenges” avoiding the word “work” as using that word already makes it sound like a chore!

11. Rewards

Rewards are to be encouraged, whether it be points, pompom or marbles in a jar or a chart resulting in a treat at the end of the day or week.

A now and next approach is often implemented in school with children who are reluctant to join in with adult led activities. The rule is that the pupil has to complete an adult led task before they are allowed to choose a child-initiated activity e.g. now complete five additions, next play with small world figures. You may decide to have two boxes to show the now and next approach. In one box, there will be the adult led activity provided from school and in the other box, there will be the toy the child has chosen to play with when the work is complete. Similarly, this can be written onto paper or a whiteboard. This way your child can see what they are working for. Schools will often use a sand timer to show the pupil how long they will be expected to work for and how long they will be allowed to have free time for. If there isn't a sand timer in the home, you could use a kitchen timer, a mobile phone, a tablet or simply a clock. The younger the child, the clearer the visual needs to be for this to be effective. Many websites offer virtual sand timers. With an older child who can tell the time, a clock should be sufficient.

How to help very young children learn at home

You do not need to set separate time or plan complicated activities dedicated to learning, especially with younger children. These activities can be built into everyday life and play. You know your child best. Avoid forcing them into lengthy planned activities if they naturally respond better to a mix of shorter activities. This can stop them getting bored or frustrated and keep them active, interested and learning through things they enjoy.

You can help your child to learn through the little things you do with them, for example:

- everyday conversations
- games with numbers or letters
- reading together
- writing shopping lists
- make-believe play
- involving them in the things you are doing, such as household chores, and talking with them about it

The best way to help children aged 4 to 7 learn is to:

- sit with them as they work
- do active and practical things, rather than trying to make them sit and listen for long periods
- try to break down the work into shorter periods, based on how long they can concentrate
- take frequent breaks
- praise or reward them when they do well

The best way to help children aged 7 to 11 learn is to:

- give them support and direction, but encourage them to do work independently too
- include active and practical things, rather than trying to make them sit and work for long periods
- try to break down the work into shorter periods, based on how long they can concentrate

- take frequent breaks
- praise or reward them when they do well

Here is a link to a list of free books that can be used.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/0/d/1zF2XJbrApnDqq3EqEAnbvOE0lZeAVlaoBOIXVMwOcmM/htmview>

This is a resource for wellbeing to support social and emotional learning.

https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wellbeing-week-daily-resources/?fbclid=IwAR0fyEUCnYSKUgiuqiSXvqWrhEfXLT5l6vakzH_XmlfHFUoyOx1ffY9Nz_Q

There are two social stories to help children who are worried and upset the news. Download here:

<https://www.widgit.com/resources/lifeskills/personal-social/upset-by-news/index.htm>

The link below is live lessons from the BBC that are useful for all ages.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/live-lessons>

Here is a list of learning and wellbeing activities to support home learning. Follow the link.

https://chatterpack.net/blogs/blog/list-of-online-resources-for-anyone-who-is-isolated-at-home?fbclid=IwAR3yTaDNtp1vjrEPNk4pleGmAQbQR7rBLao2_kQVLleue0oxgpA7xVdfsg

Phonics play are offering their website for free at the moment.

You may log in with the following details:

username: jan21

password: home

Scholastic have some free home learning resources if you click on the link below.

Early years pack:

<https://resource-bank.scholastic.co.uk/content/39880?fbclid=IwAR0Nffbz9cSFjLsM89trLhXmYYmnrLZ9iSR7gNr3ueoA4wlh525lwkSwVOY>

Key stage 1 pack:

https://resource-bank.scholastic.co.uk/content/39881?fbclid=IwAR1ZoUds35phxiM6UGFjyZpxEHk2AgwICCYb7Jr2tpv48GdW0yTZGC_Hswk

Lower key stage 2 pack:

<https://resource-bank.scholastic.co.uk/content/39882?fbclid=IwAR0PO32d2fe2hhnyhPMYH4TPppqVStlczpwAPh1nyZ5Y2Z3FiPiDFo3ocJ4>

Upper key stage 2 pack:

<https://resource-bank.scholastic.co.uk/content/39883?fbclid=IwAR03-738og6-sD-S4FKt4gyuuUpmPrkKTixVU-Tupm544vlvkkLvhr7V3Gc>