

Online learning: Make virtual school work for your family



While more than 2 million kids are homeschooled in the U.S. each year, for many families the idea of having school-age kids learn at home is new. And the pandemic didn't give them much time to plan for the adjustment.

Many schools have reopened. Yet others are still delivering class online or offering a hybrid with some days in person and others virtual. If your family is among those with children doing their classes at the kitchen table — or at a desk or other at-home location — some planning can help make your child more successful and reduce the stress for you as well.

Create a structure

The pandemic has been stressful for kids and teens, just like it has been for adults. Along with missing friends and the routine of in-person school, many have missed big events such as graduation, homecoming, prom, concerts or sports. Above all, try to have empathy for what they're going through. As much as you want to "make it all better," you don't have a magic wand. You can, however, support your child by providing a strong structure. These tried-and-true strategies may help:

- **Set a time for instruction to begin each day.** That time may be dictated by your child's need to attend live classes. Or, if classwork isn't happening at a specific time, choose a time that works for your family.
- **Encourage your child to get ready for the day as they would for school.** This will help develop a routine and teach them when it's time to focus on learning.
- **Schedule meal breaks at consistent times.** And try to serve healthy meals and snacks. While you likely don't have time for a complex lunch, you can plan by cutting up fruits and vegetables ahead of time.
- **Schedule time for Q&A with the teacher, if needed.** Your child may need help with some of the work beyond what is provided to them. This may be a challenge if the teacher(s) are not available at all times.

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Find the right balance

These are stressful times, with parents facing a variety of concerns. If you're working from home with the entire family, here are a few tips that may help:

- **Try to spend a few moments of quality time with your child before the day begins, during breaks and at the end of the day.** Hold brief, focused check-ins with your child, as these can help prevent your child from losing focus as the day progresses.
- **When possible, be present as your child is scheduled for online learning groups or distance learning classes.** This way you can help them get set up and make sure they're using their device for their work and not for play. Talk to your manager. It may be possible for you to flex your hours a little to have more free time during the school day.
- **Remember that you're not alone.** Many parents are in the position of juggling online school and working from home. If you have a meeting and think you may be called away or have kids making noise in the background, be up front with your colleagues.

Find fun learning resources

In addition to making sure your children are doing their schoolwork, try to take their personal interests into account. Many public libraries and museums have made their materials and exhibits available online and may even provide virtual tours.

This might include the following:

- Take a tour such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Yellowstone National Park, San Diego Zoo, Tennessee State Museum or Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga.
- Plant seeds or nurture a garden. If you don't have outdoor space, look for plants that thrive indoors.
- Encourage reading. In addition to books, look to recipes, online museum exhibits, educational games and other ways to build literacy.

Get support

It's a tough time for everyone, so don't put pressure on yourself or your kids. You're in this together. Try to enjoy the time together and stay positive.

Here4TN and **WorkLife Services** can help. **Here4TN's** master's-level specialists are available 24/7 to provide confidential support at no additional cost to you. You can also get five online or in-person counseling sessions per issue, per year at no cost* to you. And **WorkLife Services** can help by finding educational resources in your area, locating daycare and more.

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State and Higher Education: EAP services are available to all benefits-eligible employees and their eligible family members, even if they are not enrolled in medical insurance.

Local Education and Local Government: EAP services are available to employees who are enrolled in medical insurance. Dependents are eligible even if they are not enrolled in medical insurance.

All members (employees and dependents) enrolled in medical insurance are also eligible for behavioral health benefits.

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