

How Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Can Effectively Support Successful Virtual Learning

This is an unprecedented time and the challenges in navigating this global pandemic are as real and varied as the people who face them. Virtual learning has become a necessary approach in educating our children, and as such, it has placed greater responsibilities upon families to make certain that children are engaged in the process of learning. Parents, guardians, and caregivers know their children best, and when they engage in the learning process with their children in loving, consistent, and positive ways, children will experience success. Research evidence has shown that family support is critical for students participating in virtual learning. The reality of learning virtually at home is that, “although the online teacher can always be contacted, minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour, and day-to-day, assistance is often provided by a member of the student’s family” (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014).

Below are several evidence-based recommendations for parents, guardians, and caregivers to consider as they support their children who are engaged in virtual learning. These recommendations are addressed in greater depth in the following sections:

- I. Participate in ongoing communication with the school and teachers;
- II. Be engaged and informed;
- III. Establish clear expectations for learning;
- IV. Practice supportive communication with your learner; and
- V. Help your learner to effectively address challenges.

I. Participate in Ongoing Communication with the School and Teachers		
Main Idea	Additional Information	Resources
<p><i>Communication is a central focal point in the effort to optimize virtual learning and build positive collaborative relationships with</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out. Parents, guardians, and caregivers should expect that their child’s school and teacher(s) will have regular, clear, and open communication. While schools will be making educational decisions and communicating them to families, it is important for the adults at home to also communicate regularly with teachers, specialists, and anyone else supporting students and providing educational materials and learning expectations. ● Collaborate. Building collaborative relationships with a child’s teacher(s) will be critical to optimizing the virtual learning experience. This will be achieved through efforts to communicate 	<p>Parent Tips for Distance Learning Success</p> <p>How to Support Our Students, Families and Educators During the Uncertainty Around the Coronavirus (COVID-</p>

I. Participate in Ongoing Communication with the School and Teachers		
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<p><i>teachers, school leaders, cultural liaisons, educational specialists, and other families.</i></p>	<p>openly and honestly about what is happening at home and sharing concerns for children, while also expressing support and gratitude for the teachers' efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Express needs. The adults at home will need to communicate when students may need adjustments in order to complete work at home. Secondary students may also be encouraged to advocate for their needs. The following are examples of adjustments students may need in their learning situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexibility to complete learning tasks on evenings and weekends because they are responsible for watching younger siblings while parents work; ○ Access to higher bandwidth and technology resources at home; ○ Choice in what learning activities to complete; ○ Virtual connection to other classmates; ○ Access to an interpreter or translation of communication and learning materials; and ○ Connection to local services if families are experiencing food or housing insecurities, domestic violence, financial hardships, mental health challenges, childcare needs, specific cultural support, etc. ● Offer to help. There may also be a great deal that parents, caregivers, and guardians can offer in support of the classroom. Special skills, talents, demonstrations, and more are a great way to reinforce what students are learning, but teachers need to know what you can offer. 	<p>19)</p> <p>COVID-19 (Coronavirus) PTA Resources - Family Resources</p>

II. Be Engaged and Informed		
Main Idea	Additional Information	Resources
<p><i>Be engaged and informed. It is important for parents, guardians, and caregivers to not only engage in the virtual learning experience with their children, but to do so with clear information about what to expect from the experience.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help create and sustain the community. Creating and maintaining an engaged learning community is critical to the success of students who are learning virtually. Such a community should consist of engaged teachers; engaged parents, guardians, or caregivers; engaged peers; and engaged students (Borup, et al., 2014). ● Be Informed. The main role of parents, guardians, and caregivers in virtual learning is to monitor, mentor, and motivate (Curtis & Werth, 2015). It is important to begin virtual learning with an understanding of what to expect so that the adults and students at home can establish ground rules about expectations and structure. Consider the following suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask questions of school personnel and other parents. ○ Read through FAQs on the school website. ○ Send an email or speak directly with your child’s principal or teacher. ● Learn from others’ experiences. Research has shown that when students are engaged in virtual learning, there are common experiences that parents, guardians, and caregivers have. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Common challenges that arise in virtual learning include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concern about lack of socialization that students are experiencing; ▪ Difficulty keeping students on track with their coursework; ▪ Struggling to keep students motivated when they lack focus or interest in the online content; ▪ Technical or resource challenges; and ▪ A general increase in responsibilities placed upon parents, guardians, and caregivers that were not present when children were physically at school. ○ Common benefits of virtual learning include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A generally positive perception of online learning and the engaging content; ▪ Some flexibility for students to work at their own pace at home; ▪ A positive learning environment free from bullying and negative distractions; 	<p>Potential Advantages and Challenges of Online Schooling</p> <p>22 Remote Learning Tips For Parents Helping At Home -</p>

II. Be Engaged and Informed		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater individual access to teachers online which bolsters support, communication, and instruction; ▪ Increase in students' sense of responsibility and independence; and ▪ Transparent evidence of student growth and achievement (Sorenson, 2012). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible. It is also just as important to respond with flexibility and make necessary adjustments. Students' needs will vary from time to time. Flexibility will be key to weathering these changes well. 	

III. Establish Clear Expectations For Learning		
Main Idea	Additional Information	Resources
<p>Establish clear practices and expectations. <i>Coupled with flexibility, this clarity will help optimize the learning experience.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish good habits of engagement. At home, students are more engaged in virtual learning when the adults at home are engaged in the students' learning experience (Borup, et al., 2017). Research indicates greater success when parents, guardians, and caregivers are engaged in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Help students create a comfortable space to work that is free of distractions. ○ Establish a schedule to work each day that will optimize learning, allow for breaks, and work for everyone involved. Make certain to seek students' input regarding the schedule and make it visible for all to see and remember until it becomes a habit. ○ Be familiar with the virtual learning program and the technology that students will be expected to use. Before students are expected to get started, ask the school for a support contact, or a way to connect to other parents who understand the virtual tools. You may even request a virtual tutorial and access to other learning resources. ○ Check on students' assignments for the day or week and plan with students a course of action, prioritizing what needs to be done first: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify what, if any, assignments students will need help with and schedule a time to provide that help. ▪ Note that the younger the student, the greater the support that will be needed at home (O'Hanlon, 2012). Kindergarten students, for example, will not be able to operate autonomously and should not be expected to do so. ● Check communication daily. Encouraging students to check communication tools daily is an important habit to establish from the start. Young children will need help with this, but older children should be able to check each day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Set the expectation that children will check email, the learning management 	<p>A Parent's Guide to Virtual Learning: 4 Actions To Improve your Child's Experience with Online Learning (SPED focus)</p> <p>Parents' Guides to Student Success - Family Resources</p> <p>Be A Learning Hero – Help Your Child Succeed in School and Life</p>

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	<p>system that the district is using, e.g., Google Classroom, Schoology, etc., each day before they get started on their virtual assignments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Make certain that your contact information is updated with the school, and ask to be included in the communication from teachers so that you receive the same messages that your children receive. Most virtual platforms have a way to communicate with parents. o Utilize parent portals or other online services provided by the school to check students' engagement and academic progress at least weekly. Checking browser history also provides insight into how students are using their time online (Borup, et al., 2017). • Encourage older students to communicate with their teachers. As indicated previously, the adults who support the students at home need to maintain open communication with teachers and the school. Also, encouraging older primary students and secondary students to communicate with teachers will help children take ownership for their work and increase their sense of responsibility for their education (Borup, et al., 2015). 	

IV. Practice Supportive Communication with Your Learner		
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<p><i>Communication with children is also vitally important to the success of their learning experience. A parent or guardian can be a child's strongest support and advocate in education.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check in, stay calm, and listen. Parents, guardians, and caregivers need to be aware of how their children are feeling. Checking in regularly about how kids are feeling and then listening to their response is an important communication tool for coping with new and potentially stressful situations. Make every effort to stay calm, listen to children's concerns, and offer reassurance. ● Model. How adults talk about what is happening in the world impacts their children for better or worse. Children are watching how their parents, guardians, and caregivers are responding. Model the behavior that you hope your learner will embrace. ● Be empathetic. Parents, guardians, and caregivers understand their children's needs best. Children learn from these adults in a variety of loving and safe ways--making a meal together, singing songs in a first language, sharing stories, learning a new dance, playing games, and so much more. Transitioning to more academic learning in the home should also be a positive experience full of love, trust, support, and encouragement. ● Be patient. This is a new experience for many, and our children need time and our patience as they make efforts to understand and digest content and concepts, especially the youngest of our learners. If adults become quickly impatient, this will only detract from the learning. ● Ask questions. The adults in the home do not have to be experts in the content areas that students are studying. By asking questions, parents, guardians, and caregivers can help students think about and engage with the content as they are learning it. Consider the following suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When getting started, ask students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you know about this already? ▪ What do you still need to learn about it? ▪ Where will you find the information you need to learn? ○ During the process of learning, ask students 	<p>Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19</p> <p>Three Ways Parents Can Instill a Growth Mindset</p> <p>Covid-19 Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) Resources</p> <p>Free E-learning SEL Resources for Home</p> <p>Today.com Parenting Guides</p>

IV. Practice Supportive Communication with Your Learner

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the best way to organize this information? ▪ What is the next step? ▪ How do you know when you have finished? ○ After the student is finished, ask reflection questions such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What did you try that didn't work? ▪ Did you answer the question completely? ▪ What was the most interesting part of what you learned? ▪ What are you still confused about? ○ Adults may also want to ask extension questions such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you explain what you learned to me in a different way? ▪ Can you create an analogy for this concept? ▪ How does this concept connect to you in your own life? ● Embrace a growth mindset and convey it in your words and actions. When children are struggling with a concept, stuck, or frustrated, encourage strategies for solving problems. Consider the following suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be mindful. Parents, guardians, and caregivers should be aware of their own mindsets and make needed adjustments in how they talk about and approach virtual learning and its content so that it is a positive experience for the student and adults. ○ Focus on the process. Praise students' efforts at learning rather than their innate intelligence. Praising intelligence can backfire when students struggle because they may fall into the trap of thinking they just aren't smart enough to tackle a concept. Recognizing the small successes in the process are powerful motivators, inspiring students to keep working and learning. ○ Embrace failure. When we allow ourselves to make mistakes with grace and acceptance, we are modeling the vital role of mistakes in the learning process. Children will come to recognize mistakes and failure as a natural part of learning. 	

V. Help Your Learner to Effectively Address Challenges		
Main Idea	Additional Information	Resources
<p>Address challenges. <i>In virtual learning, as with all new things, challenges at home will arise. Parents, guardians, and caregivers need to meet these challenges with kindness, creativity, and resourcefulness.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review challenging content ahead of time. Do so especially if you know that your child struggles in a certain content area. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Math can prove to be particularly challenging for many students learning at home, so be familiar with the resources available to help your child. ○ Reading independently at home can be difficult for some students. Consider reading assigned novels along with your child if possible. Parents, guardians, and caregivers can provide added insight and rich discussion for students. ● Help reluctant, easily distracted, or unmotivated students. There are a variety of ways to help children who struggle getting started and staying on task. With student input, parents, guardians, and caregivers can help in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determine mini goals to reach. For example, parents can say, “Use a timer, work for 30 minutes and then take a 5-minute break,” or “Finish your reading and then take a 20-minute break before starting social studies.” ○ Establish incentives for students to earn by working on the assignments teachers have given them. For example, create a sticker chart or a calendar and once students earn so many stickers they get to do something special. Incentives need not be expensive and can be simple – an ice cream cone with a parent, board game time with the family, staying up an extra half hour, etc. ○ Allow students some freedom in how they want to operate. Too much freedom will stifle learning, too little will do the same, especially for unmotivated students. There must be a balance that is both sensitive to students’ needs and desires as well as the demands of the assigned work. ○ Have a candid and kind conversation and really listen to students’ concerns or struggles to help them find their needed balance. For example, say something such 	<p>Greatminds.org Math Parents</p> <p>Khan Academy Math</p> <p>Parent Roadmaps for Supporting Students in Math--by Grade</p> <p>Greatschools.org: Math articles, book lists, videos, and milestones</p> <p>7 Great Online Reading Resources for Parents and Learning Coaches</p> <p>Ideas for Home Learning and Reading Practice During COVID-19 School Closures</p> <p>English Language Arts Practice 2nd - 9th grades from Khan Academy</p>

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	<p>as, “This is how you are going to start 6th grade, so we need to figure out what is going to work for you. I promise to do my part in supporting you, but you need to find a way to do the work of learning. So, let’s talk about how we can do this together.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reinforce self-motivation and disciplined effort. Not surprisingly, students who seem to be intrinsically motivated and possess more self-discipline are inherently more successful with virtual learning (Curtis & Werth, 2015). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not all students are naturally self-motivated or disciplined, but they can learn to be with the right support. It helps to praise students when they engage in positive behavior. For example, phrases such as, “You got started all on your own today,” or “I noticed that you stuck with this, even when it was hard” will go a long way in encouraging students to keep at their work. ○ Keep students accountable for their work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist students in getting started and read the directions together for a new assignment, or review directions for an ongoing assignment, as well as any corresponding grading rubrics. Have students explain to you what they are supposed to do. ▪ Monitor students’ progress with each assignment. Leaving a student alone for hours and expecting that the work will get done is not a likely scenario for many of our children. Setting a timer to check in will help busy parents and students keep track of students’ progress. Make certain to actually have students show what they have finished so far at each check in. ▪ Proofread students’ work before they submit it and help them make corrections. ▪ Answer or clarify content-related questions whenever possible or look up answers together and discuss them when students are still confused (Borup, 2016; Borup, et al., 2015). 	

V. Help Your Learner to Effectively Address Challenges		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Encourage independence whenever possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There may be times when parents, guardians, and caregivers need to sit right beside children while they are working to answer questions, provide encouragement, explain a concept, or monitor progress. This is especially so with younger students and older students as they get started with new classes. As time goes on, it is important to encourage students to work independently as much as is reasonable. ▪ It may help to remind students that they are ultimately responsible for how much they learn from an experience or an assignment. ▪ Cheering students on, expressing confidence in their ability to do the work, and listening or helping when they are struggling are vitally important actions to lead to the success of the virtual learning process. 	

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