

TIPS FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AS THEY SUPPORT TEACHING THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME DURING COVID-19

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1. Develop a Routine

- Our minds and bodies generally prefer routine.
- I am a fan of To-Do lists and/or written schedules, to both set the stage of what is expected for the day, and at the end of the day to reflect on all that has been accomplished.
- I personally am reinforced whenever I cross something off my To-Do list, and I am proud of my own kids when I hear/see what they have accomplished in a day.
- While kids may resist work and seem content playing video games all day, there is a different psychological impact on those who feel *accomplished* vs. those who have merely *wasted a day*. Reviewing at the end of the day what has been accomplished and providing social praise can reinforce positive work habits.
- It is important to recognize that some children may need additional end of day reinforcement, beyond praise, in order to get through their To-Do list. For instance, a later bed-time, choice of a family game, a dessert treat, or extra time on electronics can provide additional incentive and motivation to do effortful and/or challenging tasks.

2. Encourage Balance and Engagement in a Variety of Activities

- Parents should embed in their child's To-Do list/list of activities more than just school tasks. I encourage families to include other things: a daily hygiene task, helpful task, exercise/outdoor task, and a new leisure activity.
- I have created leisure bingo boards for some of the younger kids I work with. The Bingo Boards encourage and motivate participation in a larger variety of activities (i.e., engaging in more than just Tik-Tok, You Tube, and Fortnite). Kids are additionally reinforced for getting "Bingo" in any direction and again for filling a card.
- Children often resort to their most familiar and reinforcing activity when at a loss of what else to do. Parents can support their child's

engagement in a variety of activities by suggesting and participating in a different activity each day with their child. For instance, scavenger hunts, old board games, puzzles and baking can become more enjoyable tasks for a child when joined by a parent.

3. Create Structure and Clarify Expectations

- Schools have rules for schoolwork, so too should parents for their children's seatwork at home. Many kids can understand the logic of "what would happen in school if you were to (get out of seat during seatwork, refuse to do work, or went on YouTube during work time)". This will help open up a discussion with your child where together you can identify rules for completing schoolwork at home.

4. Be Flexible and Allow Choice

- The order of completion is often not as important as completion. Give some choice with schoolwork.
- On a typical day, parents give their child commands at a rate of once per minute. We have all felt the stress when our child does not follow through with our directions.
- Consider how many additional directions/commands we are all giving now as a result of spending an additional 6-8 hours per day with our kids. This is a recipe for a much more noncompliance, frustration, and stress.
- Thus, one way to reduce stress would be to reduce opportunities for noncompliance by limiting commands.
- Alternatively, when possible give choice instead of directions (e.g., Do you want to start with spelling or math?).

5. Have Realistic Expectations.

- Unless the child is previously a home-schooled student, the skills needed to work successfully at home (e.g., self-instruction, self-discipline, ignoring distractions, and sustaining attention to academics for multiple hours per day) may not be strongly developed. In other words, they may be at this moment outside your child's current capability.
- The skills needed to participate successfully in prolonged independent learning are akin to muscles and endurance. You can't do heavy lifting

or run a 5K, if you can't do curl 20lbs or run a mile. The skills needed for independent learning are buildable, but they will take practice and positive attention. Be sure to encourage and celebrate progress towards this end.

- It is also important to maintain the realistic expectation that a family of any size (I am part of a family of 5) will have some sort of disagreement/frustration within a day. Conflict will naturally happen with any group that spends all day together -- particularly under these stressful conditions.
- Do not let the stressor and frustration *rule the day* and overshadow the many moments during which your family cooperated, coexisted, and accomplished their To-Do lists.
- Positive attending is always important, but now more so than ever.

6. Recognize Your and Your Children's Physical and Psychological Health Is Most Important

- Remind yourself that it is ok if you don't understand your child's lesson; you don't know the answers to their questions; you allow for breaks; or you even end the work session early for the day.
- Teachers recognize the stressors parents are faced with, as many (myself included) are experiencing the same challenges of having to support the learning of their own children. Teachers are available to help and will be understanding of your challenges.
- Parents can support their children's adjustment and well-being through modeling of self-control, positive thinking, and even adherence to a routine of their own.
- Finally, remind yourself that you are not alone. We are all figuring this out along the way, and together we will get through this.