

As we experience an unprecedented school year, our foremost wish is that you and your loved ones are well.

Many school districts and private schools are using a virtual or hybrid model. Since this is uncharted territory for parents and educators alike, we have created some tips and tools that you and your family may find to be helpful whether you have one child or multiple children attending school this year.



**Tip #1: During remote/virtual/hybrid learning, consider the environmental factors that are within your control.**

- Establish and follow a daily routine. Keep in mind that a *routine* is different from a *schedule*. This model is more conducive to the flexibility that will be required to adapt to different learning needs and circumstantial changes.
- Find a rhythm to the day that allows your child to follow the school schedule while also providing for adequate physical activity and good sleep.
- Create a distinct, semi-private space for your child to work.
  - ⇒ Keep it low distraction. Use headphones or a white noise machine to limit auditory distractions.
  - ⇒ Identify a space where you can keep them in your sight, but in a relatively low traffic/activity area in your home. If necessary, consider using a cardboard (science fair type) display to minimize visual distractions. Collaborate with your child to make it comfortable to them.
  - ⇒ Stock the area with the materials they will need – and only the materials they will need. Academic books and supplies should be kept close by, but only have available what your child will need for that session. You can change materials at breaktimes.
  - ⇒ Match the *location* to the *intensity* of the work. Be flexible. For example, independent reading can be done in a comfortable chair, but an essay should be completed at the desk or kitchen table.
- Acknowledge the dual role parents hold. You are both a parent and a teacher's helper. Have fun with identifying how you can distinguish these roles with your family (e.g. a special "teacher" hat during "school mode" until everyone adjusts more comfortably).
- Consider having sensory tools available for your child to use. For example, Play-Doh or a "fidget" toy may help improve sustained attention. You could also consider alternative seating options that provide sensory input, such as a balance ball or motion stool.

### **Tip #2: Do a mental “download.”**

- Make visual as much information as possible so your family has less information to manage mentally, thereby “freeing” more cognitive resources to be available for learning.
  - ⇒ Post information that will be useful to your child, such as a schedule, checklist, or a reference for procedures or mathematic operations.
  - ⇒ Keep a “Frequently Used” binder nearby with references they will need to regularly access. Use sheet protectors, when possible, so they can write directly on the sheet each time.
  - ⇒ Use timers to regulate breaks and independent work. Be sure to use timers that count down and do so in a predictable and calm manner ([www.online-stopwatch.com/sensory-timers](http://www.online-stopwatch.com/sensory-timers))
  - ⇒ (For younger learners) Keep manipulatives close by, such as egg cartons, paper cups, dried beans, towel rolls, Legos, etc.. This will help to make lessons more engaging.

### **Tip #3: Keep digital files organized from the start.**

- In the virtual learning environment, use a uniform digital file management system.

- ⇒ Keep it *simple* and *consistent*. Identify if files will be named by subject, date, etc.. Use highly descriptive names for clarity.
- ⇒ Use a naming “formula” and post it for easy reference.
- ⇒ File things immediately, but also be sure to do a cleanup once per week to ease maintenance of documents. It is easier to spend a few minutes each week tidying files than face a daunting task the week before exams.
- ⇒ If you find something misfiled, file it properly immediately.
- ⇒ Keep your folder system to a minimum.
- ⇒ Don’t save earlier drafts unless you have to.
- ⇒ While an efficient digital system may take a bit of time to set up, it should not take much time to manage throughout the year. Invest the time early to ensure success.

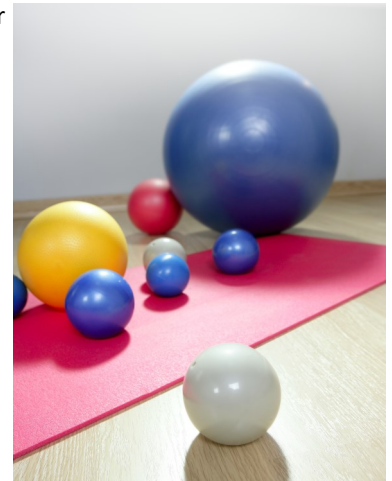


### **Tip #4: Independent (or asynchronous) worktime requires more of your supervision.**

- Break future tasks into smaller projects, so the task is more achievable and less overwhelming. Involve your child in this process so they can learn this very important skill. This can be done by:
  - ⇒ Time: set a timer and work for small doses (5-15 minutes) with short movement breaks in between.
    - ◆ A “rule of thumb” for younger children is that they can focus for a period of their age plus two. So a 6-year-old can generally focus on one task for about 8 minutes. Use 1-2 minute brain breaks in between.
  - ⇒ Or you can organize efforts by task: complete each row, module, chapter, etc.
  - ⇒ Be sure to identify your strategy as well as clear expectations before starting.
  - ⇒ When using either method, plan before walking away for a break. That is, take a moment to review what has been completed and what will come next. Help your child make a quick note of where to begin when they resume work.

**Tip #5: Be mindful about breaks so your child is restored in a meaningful way.**

- Take breaks when needed. When your child is permitted short breaks during learning:
  - ⇒ The primary focus when a break starts is to check in on basic needs:
    - ◆ Do they need to use the restroom?
    - ◆ Are they hungry?
    - ◆ Do they need a drink?
    - ◆ Do not wait until the end of the break to address these important factors!
  - ⇒ Then, have a specific list of tasks or activities they can use during their break. You can make a “menu” or label popsicle sticks in a cup for them to choose from. Some activities include:
    - ◆ Mindfulness or meditation
    - ◆ Jumping jacks
    - ◆ Yoga stretches
    - ◆ Walking around your home outside
    - ◆ Speaking with a family member
    - ◆ Frog hops or a silly dance
    - ◆ Five finger breathing
  - ⇒ This is NOT a technology break to “disappear” into another screen.



**Tip #6: Remember that academic expectations should be independent of virtual skills.**

- Focus on the curricular goals, not the individual assignments.
  - ⇒ If your child is struggling with a particular assignment structure or requirement, work collaboratively with their teacher to identify a modified or alternative assignment that achieves the same goal in a more appropriate medium for them.
- Avoid multitasking. Keep it simple! This is a new endeavor for all students, and they will navigate the technological demands differently. When possible, keep academic instructions separate from the technological factors. For example, provide technological cues (“mute your microphone”) then transition to the academic task (“turn to page 57 in your book”). Your child may have difficulty managing competing tasks simultaneously.

**Tip #7: Keep parent and teacher anxiety and stress low!**

- An individual’s ability to engage their executive functions decreases proportionately to an increase in emotional experiences.
- Children with learning, attention, or executive function weaknesses have a particularly difficult time reigning in their emotions once triggered and are more likely to use maladaptive coping strategies. They cannot access their tools once emotionally activated.
- Model self-monitoring and grace. Show your child that each day is a new day.
- If you notice your child becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, stressed, or anxious, use the 5-4-3-2-1 technique to help them regulate their emotions by feeling grounded. One at a time, ask them to tell you the following:
  - ⇒ “What are 5 things you can SEE?”
  - ⇒ “What are 4 things you can TOUCH?”
  - ⇒ “What are 3 things you can HEAR?”
  - ⇒ “What are 2 things you can SMELL?”
  - ⇒ “What is 1 thing you can TASTE?”

**Tip #8: Engage in overall wellness to practice self-care,**

**which will replenish the cognitive and emotional reserves that will be needed this year.**

- Balanced nutrition is an important factor in overall functioning. Implement a meal system similar to the usual school year – have a “snack basket” and allow your child to choose their snack, identify or prepare lunches the night before, etc..
- Exercise 4-5 times per week for at least 15-20 minutes of exertion. This will serve to decrease stress and promote focused cognition.
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule to ensure your child obtains an adequate amount of sleep each night. Avoid screens for 30-45 minutes before “lights out.”
- Be mindful of the effects of technology.
  - ⇒ Consider using “blue light” glasses for extended screen time use.
  - ⇒ Follow the 20-20-20 rule: after 20 minutes of screen time focus on a target 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Set a timer to remind them to do so and identify a target they can use.
- Engage in daily gratitude and positive self-statements.
- Verbalize and visualize goals. Help your child to identify short and long term goals for the year, and make a visual representation of them.
- Examine expectations and re-prioritize. What is feasible? What is a priority? What can we let go?

