Supporting your Child's Learning at Home

A Guidebook for Parents

Currently, the world is facing an unexpected situation, and nothing is "normal." Life in this season looks different, and it's fair that expectations can also be different. It's understood that parents are juggling work and other new challenges. In this guidebook we provide tips for parents to support their child and the educational process at home. It may feel overwhelming for parents to take on the responsibility of helping their child continue school at home. This guidebook from Professional Learning Board, a leader in online learning and teacher education, includes suggestions and solutions for scheduling, routines, balancing activities and organizing responsibilities as you support your child's learning. This guidebook also provides tips on using technology in a way that's safe and healthy for your child.

Keeping a Balance

It all starts with you

A healthy family starts with healthy parents. In these times, it is important to focus on what is most important, and that starts with taking care of yourself. As you think about your family, prioritize mental and emotional health over learning. Prioritize family time and togetherness over skill development. Prioritize people over tasks.

Balancing Structure

It is important to find a balance. While learning activities, classes, homework and other extra-curricular skill development helps keep kids engaged and busy, it need not be a cause for frustration or conflict. At the same time, repeated and unstructured days without goals or expectations, can become a space for unproductive conversations, frustrations or conflicts. Explore and discover options to create a balance that works for your family.

Self-care for ALL

As a parent, we tend to focus on the youngest in the family- the children, or the youngest of the children. It is important to remember that for the whole family to be happy and healthy together, we need to consider every family member. Sometimes a child may need to give up device time to allow their father to use it in the evening. An older child may need to be given a whole room a few times a week to work on Lego projects. A teenager may need to be allowed space to make phone calls in private. Each of these needs are valid and must be considered as you plan your family's time, schedules, and spaces.

Staying connected to the School

To help your child navigate through educational expectations, parents should consider ways in which they can help communicate and streamline a partnership with the school and teachers. As you understand the goals that your child's teachers have for your child, you can determine and provide support to implement an educational plan in a way that works for you and your family. For example, if you feel like your child is struggling with their math work every day, you might share this information with the teacher, who may be able to suggest ways to provide additional support. In a sense, you are "the teacher's eyes and ears" and can provide much feedback on how your child is responding.

Organizing Communication:

Communicating with the school and multiple teachers can be a big task in itself. To manage email correspondence, you might use folders within your inbox and keep a whiteboard or planner for your notes. If your child's teachers have a policy of copying you on every communication with your child, know that these most often do not require a response from you. They are for your information only.

Scheduling and Routine

Children do well in structure. It helps them know what to expect, and it helps them feel safe and comfortable. Make a timetable or schedule for the day. Post it somewhere where the whole family can see it. Remember to include all of the family's tasks as you create this schedule. For example, there may be times in the day when everyone in the family is doing more quiet activities. And then there may be noisy times in the day, when quiet and focused activities are not scheduled.

Time Chunks

Instead of trying to pre-plan every single task and the exact time for it, it can be helpful to create time chunks that are a little flexible and can be used for different tasks on different days of the week. For example, instead of scheduling a particular time of the day for brushing teeth, it is better to schedule a time chunk in the morning for Getting Ready which includes several tasks including: brushing teeth, changing clothes, breakfast etc.

Get Ready Time

Stick to the usual wake up time. It will help your family as your children get back on schedule when school reopens. Create a checklist of things you want them to do as soon as they wake up: getting dressed, brushing teeth, making bed, breakfast, etc. You can also pre-plan who is responsible for setting up, making and cleaning up after breakfast.

Learning Time

Plan slots in the day when your children need to work on their schoolwork. This will depend on the class expectations and schedules.

Lunch and Rest

Have lunch together as family, if possible. Tell each other stories, share memories. Talk about what you are learning. Depending on your child's schedule, you can let your kids have some rest time after lunch. If they don't want to take a nap, maybe they can stay in bed and read. It can give the adults in the house a break and some time to rest, or get work done.

Chore Time

Getting your children involved in household tasks might include wiping down surfaces, helping others, doing laundry, preparing food, etc. These lessons have immeasurable value.

Play/Leisure Time

Schedule time when your child can play with their toys, do crafts or creative activities, or just do things that they enjoy doing. This may also include relaxation activities such as laughter, meditation, reading and yoga.

Technology Time

Depending on your child's age, specify a time in the day when they can watch shows, play computer games or even work on skill development online such as coding or typing. Some parents move all entertainment to the weekend so that the focus during the week stays on learning related tasks, even if these are technology based.

Social/Communication Time

Recognize that your child, as well as every person in your family, needs opportunities to connect with people and build relationships. Your children might want to talk on the phone, play games online with their friends, and older teens might want to use social media. It is important to understand their need for communication with their friends and create safe opportunities for them to do so.

Fitness Time

Exercising regularly not only brings routine, it also boosts immunity and self-regulation.

Boredom is OK!!

It is alright if children say "I am so bored." Boredom is the point where a person stops doing what they know to do and starts thinking about other things that they can do. Creativity starts where boredom begins. So, don't worry about it at all if your kids are bored. Don't feel the pressure of coming up with new activities every moment or every day and filling all of their time with tech devices or entertainment. Let them feel bored and discover resolving this by coming up with things on their own.

Build Independence

Many parents feel a pressure of entertaining their kids throughout the day. It doesn't need to be like this. Create a schedule for your children and plan out which parts of the day you are going to be with them and which parts of the day that you are going to expect them to work or play on their own. There may be sometimes during the day where you multitask. For example, you may be supervising their learning activities but also cooking lunch. That's fine. It's really good for kids to learn to do things on their own. And it's awesome for them to know that you are around to guide them and help them when needed.

Daily Plan

There may be specific appointments that need to be tracked and remembered. For example, parents may have work calls during which they need some quietness in the house. Children may have their own webinars or live classes for school. Children may also have project deadlines that they must remember, or there may be groceries that are low that need to be ordered. Consider setting up a central location with a shared calendar, daily schedule, grocery list, whiteboard for notes, etc. This "Family Command Center" (Google it, there are tons of ideas) can contain this sort of information and help everyone know what is happening each day.

Creating an Environment

At school, teachers intentionally plan classroom layouts, décor and the environment to prevent distractions and help students focus. In the same way you can also be intentional about creating spaces in your home to help your family succeed in the various tasks they need to do at home. While a classroom space is a space that is used only for learning, in a home, a dining table may need to go from being a learning space to a "dining table" for a meal, while also serving as a board game entertainment center in the evening.

Create a space for learning where you would like your child to sit and work each day. If your child needs to use a device, make sure the space has outlets for chargers. If your child will be participating in video calls, you might set up a chair in front of a wall so that the plain background is less distracting for other students attending the call. In some video applications, you can choose a custom background. If your child needs headphones, create a spot nearby where that can be stored. Maintain a basket or a shelf near this learning space for books, pencils and other learning materials. Expect your child to tidy up their learning space when their time here is finished.

Similarly, create other spaces in the home for different activities during the day. There may be a "Lego building space", a "guitar practice" space, a particular room you use for a baby to have naps etc. This way you can plan how your family uses different spaces in the home through the day.

Managing Distractions

At this time, it can help all family members be focused on tasks when there are clear expectations for each day, especially for the children.

Mandatory Tasks

Make a list of "mandatory" tasks- such as taking a shower, reading a book, working on schoolwork for specific hours in the day, taking out the garbage etc. These must be clear, and you might even want to list these on a whiteboard or such in a common area so that they can be checked off each day. At the end of the day, before children get ready for bed, the list can be reviewed and reset. Consider that children could lose privileges such as technology time if they miss their mandatory daily tasks.

Encourage positive behaviors

Children repeat what they are encouraged to do, and if you want to see more and more positive behaviors in the home, it is important to reinforce and encourage these actions whenever you witness them. You might create a bead jar or a sticker sheet where you add in a bead or a sticker every time you catch a child doing something good- following instructions well, being responsible, working hard, or going the extra mile to help someone. If you find this may be difficult to track, you could consider doing surprise treats to reinforce good behaviors.

Plans

Talk to your child and try to create a long-term vision and some plans that they can work towards in this time. Do they want to become an astronaut? Ask them to spend a few hours a week learning about planets and space. Do they want to learn an instrument? Ask them to practice 15 minutes a day. Help them add these tasks into their daily schedule or even their mandatory task list for the day.

Device Sharing Ideas

If you are sharing a limited number of devices across various family members, here are some device management ideas:

Take Stock

Make a list of all the devices available in the house. Include phones and computers, iPads, smartwatches, Kindles, iPods or any other music device etc. Now consider which of these can serve purposes for different members of the family. Can calls be done using the smartwatch? Can school-related reading be done on a kindle? Can audiobooks be played on an iPod or a CD? Reallocating devices for alternate purposes can help manage device availability for the whole family.

Set Entertainment Times

When a schedule has set time chunks for entertainment (TV shows, movies, games, etc.), devices can be freed up for learning and work use during the rest of the day.

Create Shared Device Calendars

If a child is borrowing a parents computer/device for schoolwork and webinars, while the parent still needs to use the same computer for their work, it might be helpful to have a shared device calendar where both the child and the parent can add there essential appointment times- including meetings, live lessons, etc. In this way, if an overlap is anticipated, it might be adjusted by using an alternate device or rescheduling.

Internet Safety

When your child started to crawl, you took precautions by padding sharp edges, locking up cabinets, covering outlets, and so much more. Now that your child is "crawling" through the internet in new ways, be aware and work toward making their experience and interactions safe.

Following are suggested protocols or guidelines parents can put in place during this time so that teachers and students can continue studying in an uninterrupted manner, but also remain safe and maintain healthy and appropriate relationships that transition back into the classroom when schools reopen.

Online Risks and Dangers

The most common internet safety risks for students being online are exposure to inappropriate content, access to predators and traffickers, and cyberbullying. Let's take a quick look at how each of these happen.

Exposure to Inappropriate Content: Just like we ask our children not to let strangers into our homes, we must pay attention to how they navigate online. The internet contains a lot of advertisements, pornography, and other sensitive content. Even just weird or violent can be scary for young children. W**e must be extra cautious and ensure that we help make sure children are not accidentally exposed to inappropriate content**.

Predators and Traffickers: There are people online who try to connect with, and build relationships with children, while pretending to be their peers. These people are called predators. They connect and build relationships with children and youth thru online games, social media and other forums (often pretending to be somebody else). The predator then tries to meet the child or teen, abducts them, or convinces them to leave their family. **We need to make sure we protect our children from connecting with and interacting with such strangers.**

Cyberbullying: Kids are kids and this means that sometimes they can just be mean to each other. This may occur among peers who know one another from real life, but it can also happen with people across the world. Parents can talk to children about respecting others online, recognizing cyberbullying, reporting occurrences and getting help.

Boundary Violation Risks

There are many protocols in school buildings that help maintain appropriate and safe student-teacher relationships. For example, teachers meet with students in classrooms.

In online connections, it can be more difficult to monitor when teachers and students have direct access to each other through their own technology devices. With the internet, teachers and students are able to have private chats and video calls. This can create spaces with unsupervised access. As a parent, monitor **teacher-student interactions, (especially any which take place one-on-one) and partner with teachers to ensure that your child can receive the help they need.**

Parental Controls

Setup parental control and security settings on all devices that you children may use. It's possible that devices that were used before by adults only are now being shared with children in the family. Ensure that the content settings on these devices are set and are safe for children. Guidelines on setting up parental controls for a variety of devices and browsers can be found here:

Internet Matters
https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/

WebWise
https://www.webwise.ie/parents/parental-controls-2/

Resources for Safety Online

Following are resources to learn about internet safety risks, discuss with your children, establish boundaries and keep your family safe.

Video on Internet Safety
https://youtu.be/yrln8nyVBLU

Video Staying Safe Online
https://youtu.be/fmdWToVnWkA

Digital Safety Videos (by grade level)
https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/videos

Informational Articles for Teachers and Parents
https://www.screenagersmovie.com/resources-2

Activities
https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources#classroomactivities

Helping Your Child's Teachers and School

During this time of public health crisis, Professional Learning Board™ has been working overtime to develop tools and resources to help teachers, schools and parents. In addition to the parent guidebook you are currently reading, our company has already created the following resources for teachers and schools:

How to Teach Online for the Classroom Teacher: We know that your child's teachers know how to teach in the classroom and care about your child's education. Making the transition from the classroom to online and distance learning though can be intimidating for the uninitiated.

As experts in teaching online, we wrote a course to help make this transition easier for teachers like those teaching your child. In fact, they may be the person who gave you this guidebook. If not, please tell your child's teachers about the *How to Teach Online for the Classroom Teacher* course Professional Learning Board is providing FREE to teachers.

Please ask your child's teachers to visit https://RenewaTeachingLicense.com and click on the FREE Course option.

Effective and Safe Practices for Schools Transitioning to Teaching Online, A Guidebook for Principals and School Administrators: Today we face an unprecedented situation where schools and teachers have had to change plans almost overnight and completely adjust the way they teach and learn. This is a challenging and overwhelming situation for teachers, students, school administrators, and parents, as we navigate and find solutions.

In this guidebook, we address and cover two critical aspects that you, as a principal/school administrator, must consider: (1) Maintaining quality and accountability, and (2) Safe practices for student interaction. The first section will focus on considerations and strategies to help teachers remain connected, develop quality lesson plans, and stay accountable to the school administration. The second part is a focus on safety and planning considerations that you as a leader must keep in mind as you transition into online learning.

Please share this FREE guidebook for principals and school administrators with your school. **Ask your child's school to go to https://RenewaTeachingLicense.com and click on the FREE Course option.** They will find the guidebook at the bottom of the page.

About Professional Learning Board

Professional Learning Board™, a.k.a. PLB®, was created in 2003 in response to our founder's experience with teachers needing an online option to meet their continuing education and relicensure needs like professionals in the business world. https://ProfessionalLearningBoard.com

RenewaTeachingLicense.com

PLB® serves teachers' license renewal continuing education needs from across the country with a growing catalog of online courses ranging from five to fifteen hours as well as graduate continuing education credit courses from regionally accredited universities. https://RenewaTeachingLicense.com

ConnectedPD

Recognizing a need for PLB's courses to be accessible by schools and districts to address their professional development initiatives, the company launched ConnectedPD™. Schools have access to an extensive catalog of self-study courses they can use with their staff for remediation, expanding teachers' skills, PD initiatives and reporting tools. Whether a school wishes to flip their PD using Professional Learning Board™ courses or assign courses to their teachers, PLB® gives schools the tools they need to help improve their teachers' professional practices. https://ConnectedPD.com