At-Home Learning Tips for Families

Preparation

We are entering a new phase with the recent move to at-home learning. While this new model will require more home involvement and oversight, it offers parents and guardians the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with their children. Schools will provide guidance on the structure and expectations for at-home learning. However, as this is new to schools, everyone will need to be patient and flexible.

Get Off to a Good Start

Take time to get familiar with guidance provided by your child’s school and begin a plan for how your family will implement at-home learning. Identify and prepare a workspace for your child that is well-lit, comfortable, and will help them be productive. Take time to look over Common Sense Media recommendations for screen time, movies, and book recommendations so you can make informed decisions for your student.

- At-Home Learning Tips for Creating a Study Space
- Common Sense Media
- First Five Recommendations for Young Children at Home and Resources

Keep in mind that this may be stressful for your child. Make time to talk to them about COVID-19 and how at-home learning helps the community.

- Tips for Talking to Kids about COVID-19

Maintaining social distance is critical to efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and keeping your family healthy. That means avoiding gatherings, movie theatres, malls, visits to friends' homes, and playgrounds where equipment is touched by multiple children. But, you can go out to nature trails, walking paths, and outdoor spacious areas.

- Teaching Children about Social Distancing
- List of San Mateo County Parks

Hold a Family Meeting and Create a Daily Schedule

The family meeting offers everyone an opportunity to kick off the new adventure, set expectations, plan, and ask questions. Give your child the opportunity to have input in the plan. End the meeting with a clear plan for the first couple of days, knowing adjustments may need to be made. Considerations might include lunchtime expectations, outdoor time, exercise, start and finish times for the day, and expectations for the child when the parent, guardian, or caregiver is working at home. Keep in mind that children and teens’ sleep schedules will likely change. Don’t be afraid to let everyone sleep in a bit longer.

- Create a Daily Schedule Example
Build in Breaks

Children and teens are used to breaks while at school as they transition between subjects or classes. Younger ones also have recess. Be sure to give everyone, including the high school students, time to take breaks. The break may include a walk outside, an indoor activity like dancing, kicking the soccer ball, or a chance to connect with friends via phones. If possible, create pockets of the day for alone time, and/or quiet independent time.

Make it Fun

Ordering food or supplies online, cooking, taking walks, exploring nature, and “making” are all interactive, interdisciplinary, and fun ways to learn. Take cooking, for example, kids can read, follow instructions, use math, learn chemistry, experiment, learn about another culture, and then write about the experience and what they learned. If space allows, you may want to set up a corner where art supplies are available, or interactive and creative play or thinking can happen. Even having a puzzle available can be both engaging and calming.

• National Geographic Kids Virtual Field Trips
• 12 Famous Museums Offer Virtual Tours

Be Present, but Give Options

Stay on top of what your child needs to do and is doing. This is their new format for learning, and it will take both work and patience on your part. Don’t become too much of a task master and don’t try to control every part of the learning experience. For example, instead of sticking to a set order of classes, let your child work through their list of school tasks in an order they choose. They can check them off as they go. Help older children and teens create a longer calendar and younger children create a shorter calendar with due dates for assignments. Stickers and a typical wall calendar can suffice for monitoring work.

Children and teens like to feel they have an important role. Help them understand that this is an unusual time and we all need to pitch in to get through it. Let your child know that by sacrificing their social and school time, they are doing a great service to other more vulnerable community members. They are helping to keep people safe.

A good place for children and teens to express themselves daily is through a journal. Before starting, come to an agreement with your child about what they will share with you. Sometimes they may want to express themselves and sometimes they want to keep it private.

• Journal Prompts for Children and Teens

Hold a Daily Wrap-up Meeting

Ask your child to review their list for the day and how they did in completing each task. Ask what they thought about the assignments – which ones were challenging, which ones they enjoyed the most, etc. This works for children of every age. Review what needs to be done next – submitting work, communicating with teachers, etc. Consider a place to prominently display this document. As students turn in assignments electronically, snap a picture, create a digital file, or create an organized paper file to give back to their teacher.
Resources to Help Students with Anxiety and Wellness

Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in both adults and children. The CDC released an information sheet with strategies to assist parents, children, and teens with emotional health:

- **CDC Mental Health and Coping**

Here are other resources you might turn to to help you discuss COVID-19 with your child:


Although it may seem difficult, it is important to manage calmness. Children and teens will look to parents to gauge how worried they should be, even though it may seem like they just tune you out. Here are some tips to help your child adjust to this new situation:

- Remind them that everyone is working hard to manage the virus
- Show your teens that it is possible to continue to do what is important while practicing healthy behaviors
- If it becomes necessary to adjust plans, be transparent with your child so that they understand the rationale behind the decision. For example, if you have to postpone a trip because of new advice about safe travel, let your teen know that. (Check the **CDC travel advisories** for up-to-date information.) You can add the trip was postponed because it was not a “necessary” trip, and that the family will continue to stay to new and current routines.

There are also people you can turn to as well for support:

- Crisis Text Line - text “home” to 741-741
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 1-800-273-8255
- StarVista 24-hour Crisis Hotline - 650-579-0350

**Working with your child’s school**

- Watch for daily communication from your school via email, text or calls; information is likely to change often.
- Review who to contact for questions and concerns in your school district.
- If you cannot locate a contact for your question, please call the San Mateo County Office of Education at 650-802-5515.
- Follow guidance from your child’s teacher, teachers, principal, or other school authorities; know what is expected of you and of your child.
- At this time, most San Mateo County schools are assigning some amount of school work;
it is imperative that your child and you understand where, when, and how to turn this work back into the teacher. (Details of this are currently being discussed, and schools may not have answers yet.)

- Use the structures set up by your school to stay in touch with teachers, counselors, special education staff, and other others.
- Students who need access to meals will be provided access; please see your school or district website for this information.
- Students who need access to supplies will be provided access; please see your school or district website for this information.
- Recognize that this will be an evolving situation with more information to come. Please be patient and flexible.