

The New Normal:

Supporting Your Child's Learning at Home

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The unprecedented event of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives on every level. One major change across the world has been the shift of our children's learning into our own homes. Navigating this switch to remote platforms for our children's schooling - and in many cases our own work - is a daunting and overwhelming project.

That said, this also provides an incredible opportunity to share in the project of schooling, for a time, with our children. It is worth considering that we may never again have the chance to engage so intimately with how our children learn. Our success at this project will be a part of the history of education.

This is a learning curve for everyone. While resources are flooding the online landscape, many parents have admitted that they only add to a sense of inadequacy and unsustainability. There are no right answers, no established rules for how to pluck learning from the classroom and drop it into our own living room.

As a working mother of two young children, a certified educational therapist, and an elementary executive function coach, I'm offering my tips for making the transition as smooth, calm and successful as possible.

Set up a schedule

We all need some space to process, but if you have not set up a daily schedule by now, well...time's ticking.

Younger children especially crave structure and the time spent to plan now will provide comfort and consistency once the novelty of eating cereal in pj's at 10 am wears off. This also keeps your child on track with all of their executive functioning skills – getting through daily routines, staying on track of time, transitioning between activities, completing one task before moving on to another.

Have family members and caregivers look at the daily timeline and identify the hours and times they can devote to homeschooling. Spreading it out eases the toll, and we have found that there is some space available without time spent getting children up and out and commuting.

There are so many resources out there on social media. All of them can be adapted so don't overthink it.



Time	Activity	Ideas
Before 9am	Wake Up	Eat breakfast, make bed, brush teeth, get dressed, put PJs in the laundry, clean up the bathroom.
9:00 - 10:00	Morning Walk	Walk the dog, Yoga if it is raining
10:00 - 11:00	Academic Time	No electronics (unless needed for school)
11:00 - 12:00	Creative Time	Legos, crafting, drawing, play music, cook, bake
12:00	Lunch	
12:30	Chore Time	Wipe kitchen table and chairs, sweep/ vacuum Wipe light switches, door handles, desk tops
1:00 - 2:00	Quiet Time	Read & Relax, Puzzles, Independent Time
2:00 - 4:00	Academic Time	Electronics okay, educational games, educational shows, etc.
4:00 - 5:30	Afternoon Fresh Air	Bikes, walks, play outside, work out
5:30 - 6:30	Dinner	Dinner prep, Dinner, Dishes
6:30 - 8:00	Miscellaneous	Complete School work, TV, Shower, Tidy House
8pm	Bedtime	

Balance remote learning with “unschooling”

Pick a daily routine and collaborate with your child to plan their academic work in chunks throughout the day. They will likely begin the day with an online check in with their teacher and a review of assignments, and will have some materials to print.



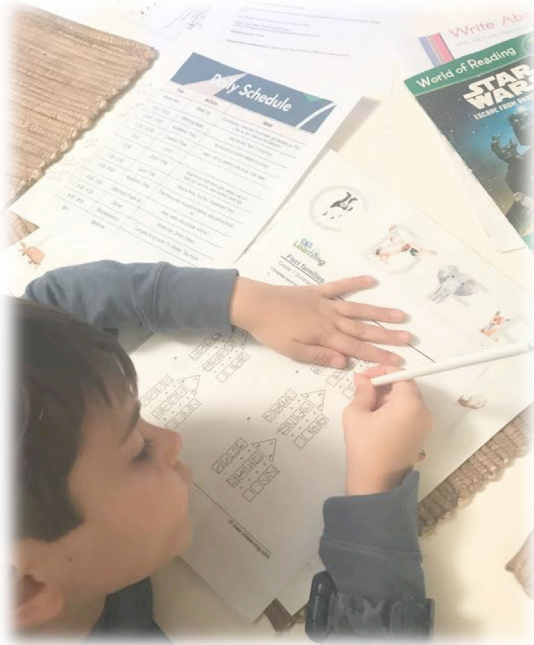
At the same time, do the whole family a favor and take advantage of the extra time in the day to build in movement, mindfulness and meaningful play in between. The thought of structuring our child’s whole day of learning is simply unsustainable! What’s more, over structuring can actually be counterproductive when it comes to the development of executive functioning. Freedom within that structure is just as important, and, as an early childhood educator, I find that the learning that happens in the in-between is the most powerful.

Resist the siren song of screens in these stressful times. Find time each day to set them aside and engage in open ended creative and project work, such as art and making, STEM and science experiments and research investigations. Besides seizing on the opportunity to explore personal interests, open ended and collaborative work boosts long-term planning, task sequencing, critical thinking, important fine motor skills, and opportunities for metacognition - having your child reflect on their own thinking and learning.

- Have each member of the family choose a **passion project** for this time – making a website, building a machine, organizing a closet - and work together to plan, organize, accomplish and reflect.
- Have your child put together a **vision board** with pictures from magazines, books or online sources that represent interests and inspiration.
- **Investigate** a topic of interest as a family. Research quality sources, record research and present findings.
- **Write a book!** Head to blurb.com to to write, illustrate and publish your own book...which arrives in the mail. It can be send as an e-book to friends and family
- **Explore Enrichment.** As an educational therapist I am always pulling content from the vast online library to tailor highly individualized instruction. My go to is always and forever Teacherspayteachers because teachers just have the most insight into what works, especially with younger learners. Commonsense.org offers science learning that meets NGSS (New generation science standards). Education.com, [khan academy](http://khanacademy) , outschool.com and adaptedmind.com are all excellent places for bolstering and extending the remote learning scaffold.
- **Stay in touch with nature.** This will be different for each family but do your best to get outside, wherever and however it is safe, every day. It's spring. Find a place to plant, dig and feel the breeze, even if it's small. Sketch plants and insects. Force a bulb. Plant a little garden. Observe. I am a Montessorian at heart and as Maria Montessori says

"There must be provision for the child to have contact with nature, to understand and appreciate the order, the harmony and the beauty in nature... so that the child may better understand and participate in the marvelous things which civilization creates."

Make space: find ways for your child to learn independently

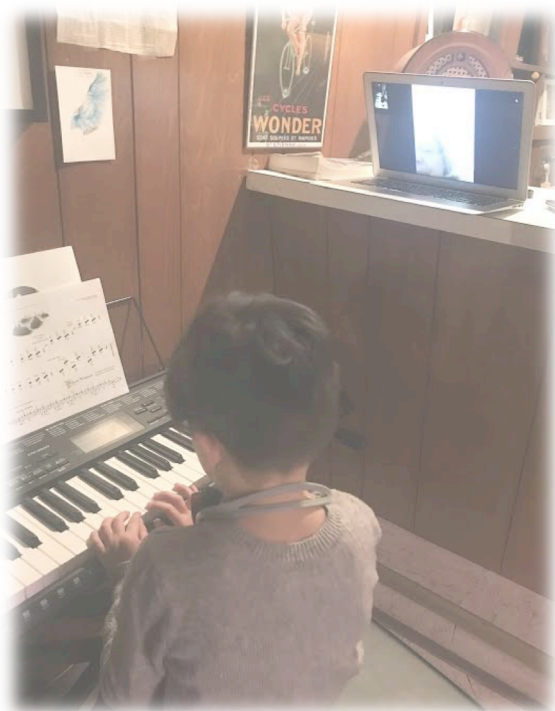


I predict that a major hurdle for parents supporting learning from home is going to be finding ways to encourage independence and self-direction. The classroom environment naturally stretches a young student's ability to problem-solve on their own as teachers are busy with many others at the same time. By taking a few steps back, you are supporting your child's persistence, grit and resilience...not to mention creating important space for your own work!

- **Establish workspaces.** Rather than having everyone on laptops at the kitchen table, choose a workspace for each family member if possible. If space is tight decide when and where family members will be working, who has the laptops or tablets, and note this on the schedule. A desk or small table in a child's bedroom is ideal, but get creative if need be to carve out learning nooks. It is helpful to have one designated community workspace as well for projects and group learning with siblings. Folders or expandable files should be kept in order and finished work should be kept separately from work to be done.
- **Draw up an agenda.** Plan out work and list activities in order for academic time, using small pictures or symbols as needed to make it visual for younger children. A small whiteboard is a great tool.
- **Clear the digital desktop.** Do all you can to minimize technology distractions for your child ahead of time. Block other websites and apps. Designate a separate home screen just for your child's remote learning, with folders for their work.

- **Settle and Stick** Communicate to your child that they are expected to use the same skills of focus and self control that their teachers expect in the classroom. Make sure pencils are sharpened, get the wiggles out if needed, take a deep breath and get started. Once your child is working do your best to model respect for work time. Minimize distractions, set the mood with soft music and save snacks and bathroom breaks for in between activities.
- **Set the timer** I am partial to the [time timer](#), but any timer will do as long as it has a visual component. Keeping track of time and committing to completing goals may feel odd at first when you're in home mode, but it is very important for keeping up executive functioning skills of time management and self monitoring. Notice the feeling of reward when tasks are checked off before the timer rings!
- **Check, check!** Have your child check off items when complete. Stop in at intervals to check in on their progress and get back on track if need be. Then leave...resist the overwhelming urge as parents to hover!

Connect as a community



Perhaps the most challenging part of this change is the sudden removal of learning from the context of the classroom community.

Research on learning has consistently shown that what children learn must be connected to a greater context and life experiences to sink in. This will make *all* the difference

in how deeply and meaningfully they process what they learn so they remember, understand and apply the knowledge. It is, for the time being, our job to provide the social community in which these vital connections and experiences unfold.

- Begin or end the day with a conversation around an **essential question**, one that connects your child's current experience to that of others and the world. What are some other big problems the world has solved together? What can we do as individuals to help our community? What are some silver linings of this experience for ourselves, others and our planet?
- Draw on the **shared experiences** of the members of your own family, your community and the world right now. These are your best and most readily available resources. Set time for group conversations together. I find that some structure is helpful...especially for families (like mine!) where everyone likes to talk at once! Try *Circles of Communication*, each member starts a circle by posing their own question or reflection related to the BIG question, and members take turns completing the circle with an answer or response.
- **Intentionally use social media** platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, to connect with others in the online community and find and contribute shared experiences, including holidays, community events and celebrations. Set up play dates with classmates over Skype or FaceTime.
- Arrange a **book swap** with a neighbor where each child chooses five books, puts them in a bag with a note and places them outside the door for the other child to exchange on a walk. Send pictures and videos to share reading experiences.
- **Reach out to enrichment teachers** – art, music, drama, robotics - they are likely willing to continue private classes remotely or have an online platform, ie Facebook live or a YouTube page.

- Do **group activities** each day. Take a walk around the block, head to [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) on YouTube for a yoga class, play sports – in whatever way you can! Hallway soccer counts.
- Just like in a classroom, each member should have **daily contributions** (read, chores). Get your child involved with the work around the house, whether helping with meal prep, organizing a closet or drawer, watering plants, learning how to properly fold a t-shirt, set the table...or sanitize every surface in the home! If you want any ideas on how to work the life changing wonder of hands-on practical life into your home [Howwemontessori](#) is a fantastic resource.

Get Growth Mindset

I know there are no tips to make this easy, but as pretty much anyone who has been successful at anything will tell you, mindset is everything. Rather than focusing on the good or the bad of this already over-polarized situation, model for your children ways to recognize the challenges and how hard they feel, and then stretch and adapt to work through them. Learning will likely be different for a long time to come and by supporting our children to push through we are helping them become stronger and more successful in both their academic and personal lives.

Looking for resources on growth mindset thinking? [Big Life Journal](#) has a wealth of growth mindset journals, workbooks and materials for parents.

Ask for support

At [Organizational Tutors](#), we are all committed to supporting parents and children in this shared project. I know that together we can work with educators to co-create a remote environment that is rich and meaningful for our children.

We are offering complimentary parent consults and sliding scale remote sessions with students. Please reach out at info@organizationaltutors for more information.

Below are examples of curriculum outlines that coordinate with the schedule above. They blend resources from school with home-based exploration and online enrichment.



Essential Questions:

*What's happening in the world right now?
(Signs of spring, current events)*

*What are some challenging things that can
happen to many people on earth and how do
people work together to get through?*

Morning Academic Time: 10 – 11:30 am

Reading: *When Can a Flood Happen?*

What's in the middle? Spring vowel sounds worksheet

Brain Break: Coloring with Classical Music

Writing: Weekend News: *Picture and text about what's happening*

Movement Break: Yoga (Cosmic Kids)

Afternoon Academic Time:

Nature walk to find signs of spring – record with sketches

Math: Write your own subtraction word problems with items from nature walk

Outside Science Project: Make a house that can withstand flooding, using recycled materials. Place it in the water table (or a large container) and fill with water. Record observations and discuss.



Essential Questions:

*What's happening in the world right now?
(Signs of spring, St Patrick's Day, current events)*

What are some challenging things that can happen to many people on earth and how do people work together to get through?

Morning Academic Time: 9:30 – 11 am

Circles of Communication: Solving problems, how children are celebrating St. Patrick's Day inside in Ireland

Reading: *Where's Al? and Sam's Ball* (leveled books from school)

What Can It Do? Picture/Sentence Match (School zone)

Brain Break: Leprechaun maze and Coloring Sheet (education.com)
Hang it in the window like kids in Ireland

Piano Lesson 10:30

Writing: Write your own limerick (education.com)

Movement Break: Leprechaun Yoga (Cosmic Kids)

Afternoon Academic Time: 2-5 pm

The Story of St. Patrick's Day (podcast)

Science: Making a rainbow with a prism

Math: 1x1 subtraction



Essential Questions:

What's happening in the world right now? (Signs of spring, current events)

What are some challenging things that can happen to many people on earth and how do people work together to get through?

Morning Academic Time: 10 – 11:30 am

Circles of Communication: Earth as our home planet, how we have to take care of it for it to take care of us. Some of the silver linings for our planet earth.

Reading: *Star Wars* (any leveled book on the topic will do!)

Phonics: Blending Blends Photoshoot Game (education.com)

Brain Break: Star Wars *Alien Add-on* drawing Activity: Each player takes a sheet of blank paper. Players take turns naming a body part with an adjective, ie “bumpy nose,” “fuzzy ear.” Eyes must stay on your own work. Share your creations at the end.!

Writing: If I Were A Jedi....If you were a Jedi on another planet in a galaxy far, far away, what would you think about what's happening on planet earth?

Movement Break: Starwars Yoga (Cosmic Kids)

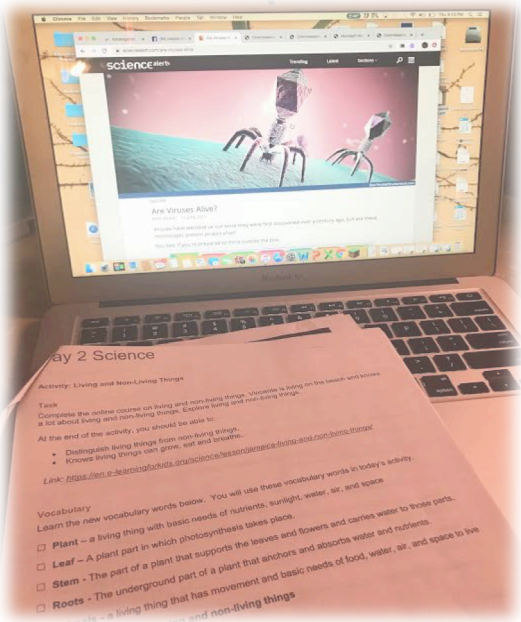
Afternoon Academic Time: 2-5 pm

Sky Map project: Create constellation map with paper towel roll, parchment, rubber band

Star Walk: Go test out your sky map outside!

Violin Lesson: 3:30

Math: Star Wars Bar Graph Project
([@teacherspayteachers/knowledgeboxcentral.com](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/@knowledgeboxcentral))



Essential Questions:

*What's happening in the world right now?
(How we are finding ways to deal with the
challenges of being separated, caring for the
sick)*

*What are some challenging things that can
happen to many people on earth and how do
people work together to get through?*

Morning Academic Time: 9:30 – 11 am

Yoga (Cosmic Kids)

Circles of Communication: What does it mean to be a member of the community? Who are important community members right now? What are their jobs? How do we stay a community without being together? Who leads a community?

Reading: *Guji Guji* and drawing (storylineonline.net)

Piano 10:30

Writing: Story Squares – what happened first, next, then, finally

Afternoon Academic Time: 2-5 pm

Social Studies: Community Membership (school packet)

Find an article or video online about support of community, clapping for doctors and healthcare workers

Science: Living vs Nonliving (school packet)

Extension: Are Viruses alive?



Essential Questions:

*What's happening in the world right now?
(BIG changes)*

*What are some big changes that can happen
to many people on earth and how do people
work together to get through? How are we
working together to get through this change?*

Morning Academic Time: 10 am – 11:30 am

Music class: Music Together w Mr. Bill (Facebook Live)

Reading: Neighbor Book Swap: *They All Saw a Cat* by Brendan Wenzel

Chester's Way by Kevin Henkes (<https://www.storylineonline.net>)

Circles of Communication: How is change important in a community's history?

Stories: 9/11 and how NY remembers it, Kat's experience of Hurricane Katrina and how the city of New Orleans remembers it

Brain Break: Animal Add-on

Animal short Vowel Work/ short o and short e (School Learn at Home packet)

Afternoon Academic Time: 1-3 pm

Letter Writing w daily sight words (incorporate homework packet)

Art: Make your own Stamp

Math: Trampoline and numbers activity

DOE homework packet

Science: Hidden Voices: Manhattan and surrounding areas with map activity (School Learn at Home Packet)

Extension: Manhattan Map scavenger hunt on family drive through Manhattan

Pick a landmark restaurant to pick up dinner!