

VIRTUAL LEARNING: 5 TIPS FOR WORKING PARENTS



Keep a structured routine.

Your child is used to having a routine when it comes to school. Even though it may seem like virtual learning lends itself well to flexibility, that flexibility can derail much needed organization. A set schedule and structure will help your child stay on track — hopefully limiting the unexpected distractions you encounter as you get your own work done.

When it comes to planning your family's virtual school routine, stick to the basics. Schedule designated times for:

- Waking up and eating breakfast
Being "ready to go"
- Logging on
- Breaking for lunch
- Working on offline work
- Resting, relaxing or playtime
completing homework

Once a virtual school routine is set, make sure your child knows what to do — and when. One way to do this is to write the schedule on poster board and place it near where your child will be doing schoolwork. If your child has a smartphone, set reminders or send text messages to make sure he or she is keeping up with the schedule.

A structured routine can also help you understand what parts of your workday may need to work around your child's schedule — especially if your child is young and requires more hands-on help. For instance, if your child needs to be logged in at 9 a.m. every morning, consider blocking your work calendar for the 15 minutes before and after so you can be available to help if needed.

Preparation is key, but interruptions will still happen.

When it comes to having your child at home all day, interruptions are bound to happen. You already know it's not your child's fault for needing help, but in the heat of the moment, it's easy for compassion to fall by the wayside and let frustration take over instead. The best way to handle and limit interruptions is to accept that they are inevitable and to plan ahead. To help limit interruptions during your workday, try the following:

- Set up a dedicated learning space with all the supplies and equipment your child needs.
- Make sure your Wi-Fi can handle the extra demand of virtual learning, especially if you also plan to take conference calls.
- Make sure your child knows how to log on.
- Know how/when attendance is counted and when your child will be offline.
- Prepare snacks and lunches ahead of time.
- Help your child understand which questions or roadblocks warrant an interruption, and which ones don't.
- Check in on your child during your scheduled work breaks (you should be taking breaks anyway!)

Even the best laid plans can fall short when it comes to weeks or months of facilitating virtual learning.

When interruptions absolutely need to be limited, or eliminated altogether, you may benefit from putting a "no interruption zone" in place, such as moving into a room, closing the door and asking your child to slip a note under the door or text you if he or she needs something urgently.

And remember, it's okay to be frustrated by interruptions — but try to limit showing your frustration. You may find that taking a long, deep breath is just enough time to instead shift your mindset to how great it feels to be needed by your child.

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Leverage your support system if you can.

Asking for help is never easy, but now is the time to call in those favors or invest in planning tools.

If you're parenting in a two-parent household and you're both working from home, divvy up your work day. Maybe you are "on call" to help your kid in the mornings, and your partner takes over after lunch. The best support system is the one that lives under your roof — so make sure you're talking about how to effectively co-parent while your child is virtual learning.

If you live in a multi-generational household or have an older child or another family member willing to help out, take him or her up on it. He or she can help facilitate virtual learning, make snacks and lunches or assist with household chores so there's one less thing for you to do after work. Any amount of support will likely relieve stress. Make sure you consider some people are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others, and people outside of your immediate household may not be being as safe as your family is during this pandemic.

Lastly, take advantage of planning tools and technology when and where you can. Many of the online learning platforms being used by schools allow you to sync your children's schedules with your own calendar. This can help you know when they're learning online and when offline work is required. It's also a great way to know what they're doing each day so you can ask if they are understanding the material and assignments.

A computer or tablet and decent wi-fi connection will be a key component in your child's virtual learning plan, so make sure you have access to these. Many schools are able to issue loaner laptops and wi-fi hotspots to families who do not have access to these resources at home.

Be upfront with your manager.

If you're concerned about managing your work and facilitating your child's online learning program, let your boss know. Explain the new challenges you're

facing, how long you expect to be facing them and what your plan is for managing your workload.

If you're currently going into the office, ask your boss if you can work from home while your child is participating in virtual learning. If working from home isn't an option, ask your boss if accommodations can be made to your work schedule, such as flexible hours.

Every parent's situation will be different, so don't assume your boss knows and understands your specific challenges. Being upfront about your concerns and maintaining an open dialogue throughout your child's virtual learning experience can help set realistic expectation and reduce stress.

Take care of you, too.

Your child's education and happiness are huge priorities, but so is your own mental health and wellness. While your instinct may be to throw yourself completely into your child's new virtual school routine, don't let your own work and personal needs suffer.

Remember, your child still has a dedicated teacher and will be spending several hours online with him or her. And while you may need to be there for support, teachers and school systems have been working tirelessly for months to make virtual learning as successful as possible. It's never a bad idea to ask your child how he or she is feeling about the virtual learning experience, but trust that teachers are doing everything they can to help your child learn effectively at home.

Lastly, set aside time to relax, reward yourself for somehow handling it all, and make sure to find quality time to spend with your family that's not just all about school.

Parenting is a tough job, and COVID-19 certainly hasn't made it any easier. But with a decent plan and a lot of patience, love and self-care, you can get through it.

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