

Tips for parents during Distance Learning

You may have found yourself playing a lot of unexpected roles in your child's education. Suddenly parents are managing the roles of classroom teacher, school principal, and sometimes even school psychologist or counselor. Some parents have jokingly emailed their schools requesting "substitutes" and social media is filled with satirical notices of children being "suspended" from home school. Wearing all of these new hats is a challenge, especially without any of the training and professional development we educators receive throughout our careers. As a school psychologist, one of my jobs is to support the teachers I work with and provide them effective tools and strategies for their students' academic success. Here are some tips for parents who are now finding themselves in roles they might feel less than prepared for.

- 1) Check in on your own mental health: On airplanes they always tell you if the oxygen masks fall down, make sure you put yours on first before helping the people around you. You will be more able to help your children when you are getting the mental health support you need. Take a moment each day to look for the good in the world. Find activities that bring you joy. Supporting your mental health and the mental health of your children can sometimes be done together. Watch an uplifting video together and talk about what you learned. Supporting your mental health will look different for everyone, so find something that works for you. It is very difficult to fill up others when we are empty. If you are struggling to support your own mental health, it is okay to ask for help. Reach out to friends and family and talk about what is hard. UNI has a great "Warm Line" for Salt Lake County residents who are not in crisis, but are seeking support, engagement, or encouragement. The number is 801-587-1055. If you are in crisis, you can call the Crisis Line at 801-587-3000.
- 2) Establish a routine and workspace: It would be exhausting to reinvent the wheel every day. If you make a schedule and stick to it, the work of getting started each day gets easier and easier. Children often benefit from structure and boundaries. If they know during distance learning we do class from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM, then recess from 10:00 to 11:00, and lunch from 11:00 to 12:00 (or however you plan your schedule), they will begin to adapt to their "new school". Consistency is really important here. Knowing what is coming next often helps reduce anxiety in children. Having a visual schedule posted for your kids to see can be also be really helpful. There are a lot of great examples of visual schedules online. For older students, they may find writing out their schedule at the beginning of each day will help them stay on track. It is also really helpful to have a space dedicated to schoolwork. This may be a space that is dedicated to something else at other times, like the kitchen table, but make sure that during "school time" there are not other things going on in that space.
- 3) Celebrate positive behaviors and skill building: As an educator, my job is primarily to add (add knowledge, add skills, add fun). I focus on specific skills or behaviors I want my student to learn or develop. If there is a problematic behavior that is getting in their way or preventing them from being successful, I try to identify a positive behavior that would replace the negative behavior. For example, if I see a student running down the hall, I would ask them to walk or if I have a student who has a habit of getting off task, I am going to make a goal for them to be on-task. When I see a problem behavior, the first thing I look for is a replacement behavior I can celebrate with that child. If they have a problem with dishonesty, I am going to celebrate their honesty. If they have a hard time with saying hurtful things, I am going to celebrate their kind

words. If your child is demonstrating a problem behavior that you want to change, reach out to the school psychologist at your school and talk to them about good replacement behaviors.

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- Take care of your mental health
- Ask for help: Talk to your child's teachers, other parents, friends, and family. You don't have to do this alone.
- Focus on what you can do rather than what you can't – There is still fun, happiness, and joy in the world, go find it!
- Establish a routine and workspace
- Make time for physical exercise
- Have patience with yourself: Even trained teachers run out of steam and make mistakes. The best you can do today may be different from the best you could do yesterday, but the best you can do is the best you can do, and that is enough.
- Celebrate your child's positive behaviors like kindness, honesty, resilience, patience, and perseverance.