

FAMILY TIPSHEET: Helping your child thrive during virtual or in-person school

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Remote or in person, this school year is a very different experience for everyone. To help make that transition easier for students of all abilities, Melissa Joseph, a social worker at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and family leaders, offer these helpful tips to parents with students attending school either in-person or virtually.

General tips

Keep communication lines open

- Listen to any fears or concerns your child has and accept their feelings and thoughts.
- Talking to children about their concerns means sharing them so they are not holding their worries alone.
- While teaching about safety and good hygiene, try not to pass on your own fears and anxieties.

Teach Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of bringing a gentle, accepting attitude to the present. This is a great skill to help kids while they are in school or at home.

In your breathing

- The breath is our anchor in every moment. When we get anxious, our breath is affected. Research shows that by focusing on how we breathe in and out, we can relax and feel less stressed.



- If you help kids notice their breath, you have given them the power to manage their challenges. Young kids can practice by imagining things like smelling a flower (inhale) and blowing out a candle (exhale).

In your body

- If you are aware of how you hold stress in your body, you reduce your anxiety. The way we carry our body can show if we feel stressed or not.
- Ask your child what part of their body feels tense (for example, their shoulders or neck) and how releasing that tension can be very useful (rolling their shoulders to relax or stretching).

Getting started: explaining virtual school to your child

[A Little Spot Learns Online: A Story About Virtual Classroom Expectations](#) (Diane Alber)

For Virtual School Learners

Shower and get dressed

Getting out of your child out of their pajamas and eating breakfast can help put them in the right mindset for being attentive for their online/virtual school.

Provide a quiet workspace for your child

Create a dedicated study space for your child. Think about things like a quiet, clear workspace with a chair that they can sit comfortably in for longer periods.

Promote online safety

Make sure you have taken all the precautions to keep your child safe online. These are some online resources to help guide you and your kids in making wise choices:

For parents and schools

- [Resources for parents, schools and children to provide safe online experiences for children](#) (End Violence.Org)
- [Guidelines for teachers/educators during any digital or online contact with student](#) (International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children)

Activities to do with your family

- [Home Activity Packs](#) (Think U Know)
Short and simple activities kids can do with their parents to learn about online safety at home



- [Digital Citizens Curriculum](#) (Common Sense Education)
Provides interactive lessons and activities for all students from kindergarten to Grade 12

Resources for young children

- [Online safety: advice for parents, young children and carers](#) (eSafety – Early Years)
- [Story puzzles: online safety adventures](#) (eSafety – Early Years)
- [The Zorbs: Big Trouble with the Small Screen \(Episode 2\)](#) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

When in online school

Share e-rules

Share rules for your child to follow during online learning such as turning their mic off when they are listening, turning on their camera if they feel comfortable and raising their hand to ask a question or make a comment.

Ask questions

Just like in “regular” school, encourage your child to talk to the teacher if they don’t understand something. They can “raise their hand” in their virtual classrooms. Some kids may need weekly check-ins from their teachers if that support can be provided.

Schedule time

Help your student develop a calendar that outlines how their school day will be structured and place it in a spot where they can see it everyday during their class. This can be a dry erase whiteboard or a calendar posted on a corkboard by their computer/laptop.

- In addition to class time, make sure you schedule breaks in your child’s timetable for studying and homework, as well as breaks to go for a walk, or to grab a healthy snack.
- A good rule of thumb is to maintain focus for 30 to 45 minutes at a time and take 10-15 minute break.
- Try to keep schoolwork within school hours to mimic a school day.

Allow for flexibility

Even with a set schedule, your child will need some flexibility in their day. Some days will allow your child to follow the schedule to the letter, while other days will not. That is ok.



Be kind to yourself and your child

If your child isn't following the schedule well, be kind to them.

- Everyone has a bad day and especially during times of uncertainty.
- Ask your child to start each day with a renewed commitment to the routine without judgement of the past or fear about the future.
- Encourage your child to approach their school one day at a time.

Advocate

Just like with in-person school, make sure your child has a trusted adult to turn to. This adult can be a teacher, assistant or a counsellor at school. If your child needs extra support like an extension for an assignment, or if asking questions in class is tough, they can turn to this trusted adult for help.

- Formal accommodation from an individual education plan (IEP), such as extra time, should be in place for students in virtual school, as they would at any other time.
- Parents should speak with their child's teacher if their child is having difficulty advocating for themselves. They can also share their child's IEP and learning profile with the teacher to help their child be set up for academic success.

In Person-School Learners

Prepare them for ongoing change

Change can be very difficult for some children.

- Remind your child that the school's plan may change based on safety.
- Remind them that there is the possibility that schools may not open for in-person learning at all times this year, but you will manage the changes and challenges together as a family.

Keep things in perspective

It is important to focus on the big picture. Whatever is lost or delayed in the moment, either academic or social, can be recaptured later.

- If your child feels overwhelmed by the amount of homework, work with their teacher to reduce the volume and come up with a more reasonable amount that the child can accomplish successfully while still learning key concepts.
- We can even just be mindful about the need for catching up at a more appropriate time.



Help your child be kind to themselves

All students have been away from school for months and everything is new.

- It is common to feel stress in times of transition and especially during times of uncertainty.
- Make time for your child to relax after school and use opportunities to practice self-care.

Connect

Keep in touch with other parents with kids in the community. You can find out how they are coping with hybrid (a mixture of in-person and remote schooling) or remote schooling and learn new ways of managing your own situation.

- By building this parent network, you can reduce your own anxiety with support from others.
- Depending on your own work and childcare situation, you may need to turn to other people to support your child's educational and emotional needs in these unusual times.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.

We encourage you to visit our [website](#) to access all of our COVID-19 or Coronavirus specific family tip sheets.

If you are looking for other family resources that have to do with childhood disability, please visit www.hollandbloorview.ca/resourcecentre.

Created by Melissa Joseph, Holland Bloorview Social Worker, Family Leaders and Family Support Specialists at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital on December 21, 2020. If you have a question or a resource to share, please feel free to reach out to us at resourcecentre@hollandbloorview.ca

