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Getting Involved in Your Child’s Home Learning During the Pandemic

The 2020-2021 academic school year may prove to be a challenging time for students and their parents amid the coronavirus pandemic. You may be wondering how the school year will unfold. Or, you may already have a plan in place but recognise it may need to change as pandemic restrictions and the school year evolve.

Whether you have the option of in-person or remote learning by video link—or some combination of the two—parental involvement will be crucial to your child’s academic success. While this may seem like a difficult task, with careful planning you can help your child succeed whether at school or at home. Below are some tips to help reinforce study and homework habits and encourage your child’s love of learning now and in the future.

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Choose a time of day for schoolwork. Think about your child's nature. Do they have too much pent-up energy at certain times of day? Are they sluggish after meals? Finding the right time of day will help your child respond better to studying—or independent distance learning—and be a more productive student.

Make it a daily routine. Encourage "schoolwork time" each and every day, especially if your child’s school has extended periods of independent study. The earlier children get into the habit of study time—even if it’s only for a short period—the easier it will be for them to adjust as their workload gets heavier.

Determine your child's style of learning. Does visualizing a concept through pictures or images, or when listening to someone, work best for your child? Or, perhaps your child is a tactile learner and prefers to "practise" or "do" what they are studying.

Create a workstation. Find a place with lots of light that suits your child’s style of learning and where your child can study comfortably. A desk or even the kitchen table will do. Keep children away from the TV during scheduled schoolwork times.

Help your child get organized. Have the right tools available and easily accessible. Paper, books, pencils, binders, planners/calendars, calculators, and other tools are a requirement for good study habits.

Go over homework together. Paying close attention to homework will not only help identify any potential difficulties but also lets your child know that you’re interested in them and what they’re doing. Offer to check the homework once it’s completed. If your child needs help, offer to pitch in, but remember that it is your child’s homework and they are responsible for completing it.

Give kids a break! When the going gets too tough, let children take a short "time out" to shake off any frustration and regain their focus. Offer praise. Consistent and specific praise positively reaffirms solid study habits and builds confidence.
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Stay involved. Talk to children about what they're studying at school and encourage them to let the teacher and you know when they don't understand a new topic or idea. Ask kids questions to determine whether or not they really "get" something.

Monitor assignments. Stay in the "know" when it comes to your child's assignments including how long they should take and when they are completed. Many schools now offer a detailed curriculum description online so that you can keep track of key learning objectives. You can help your child set up a calendar of school projects and mark each one off as it is completed. This will help both of you keep on track and avoid any hasty late-night projects.

Stay in touch. This year, more than ever, it's important to stay informed. Visit your school district's website and sign up for announcements. Parents and caregivers can get more information on back-to-school guidelines by visiting their local school district website.

In addition to good study habits, there are many other ways that you can encourage your child to enjoy learning:

Encourage reading. Read aloud to your child and encourage them to read to you. Storytelling is not only the basis for reading and writing, it helps develop memory skills and encourages the imagination.

Incorporate learning into everyday life. Whether you count shopping cart items at the store, look for interesting shapes in a room, "eye spy" for colors, or sing number songs in the car—learning can be part of anything and everything you do with your child.

Give older children the chance to help out and feel a part of the action. Have them write out your grocery list, map out directions for a journey, measure ingredients for dinner, address a letter, or post messages for other family members.

Be a role model. Children often copy adult behaviour. Engage in quieter, similar activities while kids do their schoolwork. If they have a reading assignment, pick up a book and read. Support the study of a big math test, by going over your chequebook. These "parallel" actions set an example and help kids feel less like they're the only ones that have to do work. They also demonstrate why learning can be a family matter and should be a lifelong undertaking.

This school year may be a challenging time but it can also be a rewarding experience as you guide your child and take an active role in their education.