HWDSB

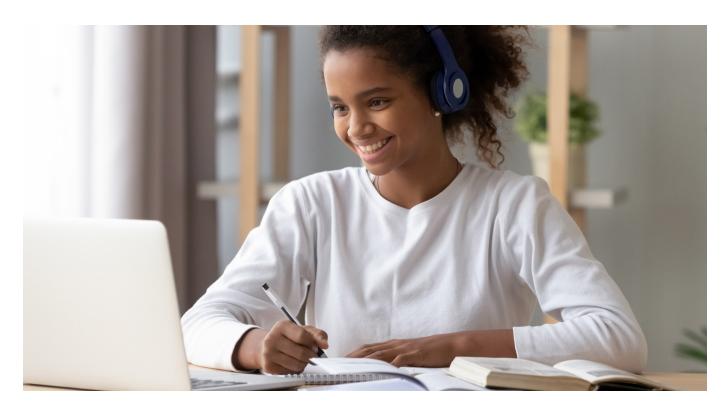# Help your child learn at a distance: tips for parents

How to support your child with learning at home during the COVID-19 closure

Prepared by HWDSB Psychological Services

Supporting students to continue to learn at a distance while schools are closed due to COVID-19 is a new and challenging experience for everyone. We are all learning as we go along. Your main job continues to be a parent – not a teacher. Learning at a distance is not school, and you will not be able to replace all the structure from a school day and school environment, particularly for younger children who are just beginning to develop independent work skills. Focus on supporting learning rather than teaching.

These are some strategies that will help children practice skills that contribute to academic success and reinforce what they are learning at school (as well as hopefully help make things at home more manageable). If school work is putting undue stress on your child or family, or you have questions about your child's specific learning needs, please talk to your child's teacher.

curiosity　　　creativity　　　possibility

Create a Home Learning Routine

Creating a routine at home will help to provide your children with some structure and predictability, and hopefully help to decrease everyone's stress level. The routine is not meant to be strictly followed, but instead to provide an overall framework for the day, allowing your child to feel that he/she understands expectations.

- A home learning routine should include a plan for:
    - when your child is expected to wake up in the morning - this will differ depending on the age of your child but should ensure that your child is getting sufficient sleep and maintaining a healthy routine (i.e., not staying up too late, even teenagers). If possible, maintaining long-established routines like bed-time and wake-up routines can be comforting for children.
    - what time of the day will work begin and end.
    - setting a goal for how much work will be completed over the course of the day.
- Remember, your role is to support learning, not teaching. With this in mind, set realistic expectations for the day, and what is reasonable for a typical child this age. A good rule of thumb is to have children work for 20 minutes, followed by a break before moving on to the next task. (Younger children may need to work for shorter stretches, while older children can work for longer before requiring a break.) Your child may need more flexibility — especially if your child has learning challenges and/or difficulty with attention, as learning may require more effort and energy.
- Schedule frequent breaks with opportunities for movement and fun! If your child has difficulty transitioning back from the break, it may be helpful to set a break timer.
- Your child may wish to work with you to create the routine and don't be afraid to change the routine if it is not working for you or them.
- Your child may want to follow a similar schedule to what is familiar at school (i.e., language, recess, math).
- Some children may want or need a lot of structure (i.e., breaking the day into morning and afternoon learning times that are broken into 20-minute sessions). Other children may respond better to a more flexible structure that allows them to work on one or two subjects per day rotated across a week (i.e., reading in the morning, and math in the afternoon).

- Minimum expectations for learning time per week based on learning materials and work assigned by your child's teacher, as suggested by the Ministry of Education:
    - Kindergarten to grade 3: Five hours of work per week, with a focus on literacy and math;
    - Grades 4 to 6: Five hours of work per week, with a focus on literacy, math, science, and social studies;
    - Grades 7 to 8: 10 hours of work per week, with a focus on math, literacy, science and social studies; and,
    - Grades 9 to 12: Three hours of work per course per week for semestered students, and 1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students, with a focus on credit accumulation and graduation.
- Follow your child's lead and if they are having considerable difficulty focussing on a task, move on and return to it later.
- Use family time to promote learning as well. For example, baking can be a wonderful lesson in reading and fractions, or a family walk can lead to discussions about directions (north, west, etc.) and nature. Card and board games can also be fun math-related activities for younger children.
- Something else to remember is that our children are accustomed to eating throughout the day and not just at traditional breakfast, lunch and dinner times. The balanced schedule in elementary schools allows for two nutrition breaks, one in the morning, typically around 10:30 a.m., and a second in early afternoon, typically around 1 p.m. So, if it seems like your child is constantly asking for snacks, it is because this is their familiar structure.
- Take your child's lead and connect learning to special interests whenever possible.
- It may take several days to adjust to a new routine, so be patient.

Create a workspace

Just as your child's day needs structure, so does their workspace. To encourage focus and engagement, it is best if you child works in a space with limited distractions (to the best of your ability during these close-quartered time) and with materials on hand. This will limit the number of times their work time is interrupted because they need to 'find' something, and then struggle to get back into work mode. Suggested materials include: pencils, pens, paper, computer/tablet (charged!), ruler, pencil crayons/crayons, drink of water.

Strategies to help older students with organization and planning

The demands of multiple subjects and multiple projects in middle and high school can become overwhelming. Older children may need help with organization and planning (e.g., prioritizing, creating goals, and setting time lines). Breaking tasks down into smaller parts and doing it step by step makes it more manageable, and helps avoid stress and procrastination.

Start at the end: What is the end goal?

- Before your child starts any project, they need to ensure they have a general idea of what the main goal or end product will be. This will then determine the steps needed to complete the project, and where to begin. They may need your help to visualize what the task will look like when completed.

Make a list of tasks or steps.

- Work with your child to write down every task that goes into completing a project. Put the tasks in order to determine what is the first step, second step, etc.

Make a list of the materials needed.

- Help your child identify what materials they will need, and gather them in advance. This way, your child won't have to stop working to search for supplies.

Assign a timeline for each task or step.

- Count backward from when a project is due to see how much time is available to complete it.

- Consider how long your child can typically work at each sitting or stretch of time to help determine how to divide the work up. Build in extra time for tasks that your child finds challenging.

- Use a visual calendar to schedule each step in order. Show your child how doing a little work each day can help get projects done. Your child may feel a sense of satisfaction by checking/crossing off each step as it is completed!

- Using a visual clock or timer while working on a task can help your child get a better sense of the passage of time and how long a task is actually taking to complete. This will help determine if the project is on schedule.

- Check in often with your child to determine if the timeline is still realistic, and help your child revise the plan as needed (e.g., have your child consider if the goal for the day was met; what worked well; what challenges got in the way; what will they try differently next time?)

Celebrate and reward accomplishments along the way!

Remember – priority number one is to remain healthy and safe during these challenging times.

If your child is struggling, there are resources to help:

We Help.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

COVID-19
COMMUNICATION

CRISIS: Call 911 / Visit your local hospital emergency room

URGENT:

Kids Help Phone
24/7 counselling and information for youth:
- **1-800-668-6868**
- **kidshelpphone.ca**

COAST
Mental health crisis outreach and support for all ages.
- **905-972-8338**
- **coasthamilton.ca**

NON-URGENT:

HWDSB *Helps.*

Get help or share anonymous tips using…
- **Text to 905-963-0066** Standard rates apply.
- **The HWDSB Helps app for iOS and Android.**
- **Web chat - www.hwdsb.on.ca/wehelp**