

8 Tips to Help Your Child Focus and Stay Engaged During Distance Learning

As schools are faced with the challenge of providing learning opportunities for all students at a distance, parents are called on to be more involved than ever before, particularly for their younger learners and those with learning challenges and disabilities. Maintaining high levels of engagement can be challenging, even for savvy adult learners.

How do we best help our kids make the most of these distance learning experiences?

The term “engagement” refers to the amount and quality of time students spend on distance learning activities. Distance learning activities can be in a synchronous (real-time) learning experience where students have some type of scheduled online interaction with a teacher or group, or asynchronous (not in real time) learning experience where students interact with online resources at their own pace.

Regardless of the mode of delivery, many students are asked to be engaged in a way that’s new to them. Teachers might hold live or video-recorded class lectures or activities, or perhaps parents are given digital learning resources to work through with their children. Without effective supports for children from teachers and parents in place at home, families can easily become disengaged and frustrated.

Here are eight tips to help your child maintain focus and stay engaged during this time of distance learning.

- 1 Understand the expectation for distance learning.** How much time should students spend online for learning purposes? There are screen time considerations for all students, and older students can handle longer amounts of time than younger students. Your child’s teacher or school should provide some guidance for what is reasonable. For young children, interaction and play is valuable for learning.
- 2 Determine what type of activities work best for your child.** Are there certain types of distance learning activities that your child prefers over others? For example, does your child work better with synchronous activities where they respond to a live instructor, or in person sitting one-on-one with you? Which learning platforms seem to engage your child more than others? The answers to these questions can be valuable for you and your child’s teacher to help plan for learning experiences that work best for your child.

Insight from special guest contributor:



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Key Points

- Without effective support, distance learning can be frustrating for the whole family.
- Flexibility is key: Provide children the opportunity to move and be physically active, and adjust schedules as necessary to improve their engagement.
- Be open to and provide two-way feedback: Both teachers and parents are new to virtual schooling.

Client Conversations

- 3 Encourage movement.** Kids need to move their bodies frequently throughout the day. Allow time for exercise before your child is expected to focus on a distance learning task. Some children are able to better focus on tasks when standing. Consider placing the computer or tablet on a raised surface so that your child can stand.
- 4 Reduce distractions.** Where possible, reduce distractions when your child is completing schoolwork. This includes noise as well as visual noise or clutter. A designated workspace that is comfortable for your child will be helpful.
- 5 Adjust the schedule as needed.** If your child is frustrated—or alternately, if your child is very engaged in learning—adapt your schedule to allow for a break (and revisit at a later day or time) or to spend time delving deeper into the topic. Some learning activities will be easier to move through than others. Consider working with your child on those activities or subjects that are more difficult during the times of day when your child is most alert and engaged. Learning material that is easier for a child, and therefore moved through more quickly, can be completed at a different time (such as in the afternoon or even another day). It's also helpful to share with your teacher what is working best for you and your child.
- 6 Use a checklist for focus.** For some children who really struggle with focusing, a basic visual checklist of tasks needed for a particular activity will be helpful. For example, if the child is asked to watch a lesson, read a prompt, and then provide a written response to the prompt, the checklist would have keywords for each of these required activities: watch, read, write. The child would check off each task with you as it is completed and receive some positive praise or another reward when finished.
- 7 Give your child (and yourself) a break.** Teachers don't want your child to be frustrated with, or miserable about, learning. In fact, teachers spend time trying to make lessons interesting and tailor instruction to provide the right level of challenge for their students. If something is too challenging or your child has hit a frustration level, it's okay to stop the activity and give him or her a break. It's also okay to slow down the pace, which means giving your child time to think and process information. It also means participating in segments of learning one at a time rather than trying to tackle a whole lesson in one sitting. You can give yourself permission to pick that lesson back up another time or another day.
- 8 Provide immediate positive feedback.** Each time your child completes distance learning instruction, provide immediate and positive feedback! Something as simple as putting a check mark, star, or sticker on the work assignment can go a long way in helping to motivate your child. And don't forget to celebrate yourself, as you are playing such an important role to help your child learn and grow.

Client Conversations

Examples of rewards: praise; stickers; choose a movie; a treat such as ice cream, candy, or a popsicle; tablet time; choose a family activity; play with a special toy; free choice time; or an extra 15 minutes to play before bedtime.

Teachers should plan for a variety of learning experiences, online and off, and be able to support parents by modifying or adapting activities to meet the needs of their students. Schooling from a distance is just as new for teachers as it is for parents. Getting feedback from parents about what's working and where they need additional support is essential.

A Final Note

2020 has certainly thrown us all a curveball. But with creative thinking and effort by teachers and families as partners, children will not only continue to build their knowledge and skills—but also confidence and a love for learning.

Visit hartfordfunds.com for other helpful resources on adapting, professionally and personally, to a virtual world.

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