

**Advice for Parents Newly Faced with Homeschooling**  
**From the Faculty in the College of Education and Human Development at UND**

Most importantly, try to keep in mind that perfection is not the goal for helping your kids with their learning. Be patient with yourself. So what if they had a little extra screen time today? It's not a big deal in the larger scheme of things. The world is stressful enough right now, so approaching homeschooling with some self-compassion, and maybe even some humor, will help ease tensions and show your children how to cope with the difficulties that life throws us all.

Also, lean on the help and expertise of your children's teachers, administrators, and counselors. They have been working heroically to quickly compile resources and get technology access to every child. These are adults that truly love your children, and they're missing them right now, so don't be afraid to be in contact for advice or just saying hello. Remember, everyone is in this new world of distance learning together, so have patience with one another at home and with classroom teachers! And keep looking at your district's websites for links to resources. These are high-quality, trustworthy sites that can help with all sorts of issues, including how to talk about COVID-19, helping with academics, and attending to the entire family's mental and physical health.

Several pieces of advice came up over and over from UND's Education & Human Development faculty:

- Kids learn from all the daily activities around the house, so involve them. Doing the laundry? Your very young child can pull clothes out of the dryer while you comment on colors, count, and offer directions about where to place the items, which is great for following directions. High schoolers might learn to do loads independently, a skill that will serve them well as they go off to college or their own homes in a few years. Cooking? Have young children help and count the number of cups or spoonful of ingredients while naming the items and talking about the smell, texture, and color of the food. Have teens start planning menus, helping with grocery shopping, and developing a repertoire of some nutritious meals that they can prepare when they are on their own in a few years. Even kitchen "failures" are learning experiences and add humor to the day!
- Routines can be extremely helpful. You don't have to replicate the typical school day, but having a sense of when things will happen can give kids a comforting feeling of structure in a time of great uncertainty. Of course, parents and children ought to do what feels right for their family. For some, creating a strict schedule for themselves and their children will bring peace of mind. For others, though, that could create additional stress. And don't forget the importance of having a good sleep routine. It might be tempting to let weekend bedtime hours take over, but getting lots of sleep at predictable times will help kids stay focused, motivated, and better behaved. The more variable their sleep time, the harder it will be for them to get to sleep.

- Give kids some choice. Try getting kids involved and let them have a voice in the planning of routines. At school it matters whether you're in biology or history at 1:35, but at home it makes no difference. Allowing children to choose which subjects or assignments they do during which times of the day will help with motivation and children feeling a sense of control. Maybe even try "genius hour," where kids get to pursue whatever topic interests them, whether it's how hotdogs are made, French poetry, or learning about the different breeds of cats.
- Movement, movement, movement! Kids at every age and of all abilities need to move. Get them to do some sort of physical activity, whether doing chores around the house, walking around the block, following an exercise video on YouTube, or just stretching. This should be part of the day's routine. And spread it throughout the day. Exercise scientists recommend the 30+2 or 60+5 rules. That is, for every 30 or 60 minutes of sitting time, intersperse activities, games and movements that kids find enjoyable and accessible for 2 or 5 minutes, respectively. For younger kids, you might need an active break every 10 or 15 minutes. Even just some "loud time," inside or outside, in which kids can be as loud as they want for a few minutes, can help let off some steam. All this movement and loud time can keep them physically fit, help them sleep, and improve any behavior problems you might be seeing.
- Keep reading. Literacy is a crucial skill, and it only gets better with practice. Read with small children every day. Older readers can read on their own, but model its importance by also reading yourself. Be open to kids reading all kinds of materials, including traditional children's literature, comic books and graphic novels, magazines, instruction manuals, and more. All of these can build vocabulary and reading skills, so let interest be the deciding factor.
- Use your time together to boost confidence and positivity. When spending time with your child, use words that describe the hard work the child is doing instead of just a "good job," even if the outcome isn't perfection. Let your child know that you appreciate their help and state the strengths that you see in them. Find the positive in what they are doing instead of the negative. Tell children what you want them to do rather what you don't want them to do.
- Go get meals that districts are distributing. Most districts are continuing their school meal programs, and everyone is typically eligible to get one regardless of income. Getting one can provide a nutritious meal, give the whole family a great excuse for a walk, and break up the monotony (or financial challenges) of eating whatever's left in your pantry.
- Be sensitive to signs of frustration or fatigue from your child. To avoid meltdowns or conflict for both of you, re-direct them to a non-academic activity. Deep breathing or a quick walk around the house – or maybe a few minutes with a fun puzzle or favorite app – can help clear the mind and let both of you focus and get back to the task that's frustrating.

- Know that some negative behaviors you see may be as a result of life being different. Students feeling anxious, worried, tired, restless, angry, and afraid of the unknown are oftentimes underlying causes for the ways children may act out. Talk to your children and ask them how they are feeling and why they might be feeling this way. Reassure your children that you love them, are here for them, and that life looks different right now, but it won't be forever. Talk about summertime events they are looking forward to as well as opportunities they will have once they return to school.
- Try to replace some of the socialization they're missing from peers. Keep in mind that your children are likely missing their friends. Encourage them to send text messages, write letters or emails, or even have virtual playdates over FaceTime or Skype. Just because they have to have social distance doesn't mean that have to have relational distance too.

#### Special advice for younger children:

- In these difficult times, the most important need to meet first is *safety* and *connection* for learning to occur. Taking extra time to offer opportunities for bonding and security to your child through extra cuddles, shared reading, play, and simply completing everyday activities together will set the stage for *all* learning.
- Use emotion words. Your child will know this is a different and perhaps difficult time. Your words matter! Using emotion words to describe your feelings as well as theirs offers a vocabulary for feelings. You can say "Mommy is sad" and say the reason. Label the child's feelings such as, "You seem mad... the blocks fell before you were done stacking" so that young children begin to have words to share their feelings.
- For math, younger children can find patterns, shapes, colors, and more by using everyday items at home. Organizing, lining up objects, and seeing how they are the same or different are great ways to get young minds thinking mathematically. Create a pattern of colors or objects and have your child complete the pattern. Once they catch on, have them create the next pattern! Use grocery items to add, subtract, multiply, or divide; figure out how much time it would take to wash and dry a few loads of laundry; pretend you are going to paint the living room and calculate how much paint you will need; draw a map of your neighborhood and figure out distances around buildings and blocks.
- Build up kids' comprehension skills by asking them questions about what they are reading. Ask things like, Before we read the story, what do you think it is going to be about? What do you think will happen next in the story? How do you know? Tell me about this character. How are they the same or different from other characters? Draw a picture of your favorite part (scene) in this book, then tell me about it. If you were a character in this book, who would you be? Why?

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