



SUNFIELD CENTER

EFFECTIVE REMOTE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

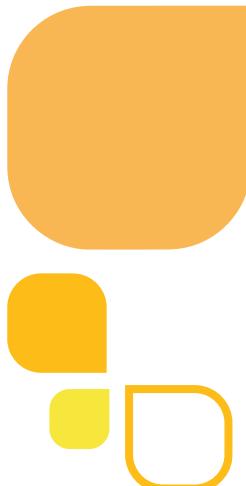
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CENTER FOR AUTISM, ADHD
AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

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INTRODUCTION



The expectations placed on parents are greater than ever before. In addition to supporting children through remote schooling, many parents are juggling full time jobs, caring for younger siblings who require attention, or having to provide one-on-one support to children with special needs.

Our kids are also being challenged with this unprecedented shift to online learning. While remote schooling is necessary right now, it is obviously not the ideal learning environment for most children. Dr. Suzi Naguib and the Sunfield Center team compiled a set of research-informed recommendations for parents who are assisting their elementary students with remote schooling. These recommendations, when applied consistently, will help parents foster a supportive and nurturing environment and make learning easier.

RECOMMENDATIONS

BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

First and foremost, please remember to be kind to yourselves and your children during this time. Below are some ideas for what you can do to reduce some of the stress you and your child may be experiencing:

Use positive self-talk

- “My child is trying their best and I am proud of them.”
- “I’m doing my best right now.”
- “I’m giving my all, and that’s enough.”
- “I don’t have all the answers, and that’s okay.”

Take time to engage in self-care each day

- Go for a short walk.
- Take 5 minutes to yourself.
- Connect with other parents.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Put yourself in your child's shoes

- If your child has attention and/or executive functioning challenges, they might be having trouble with daily school activities.
- Hyperactive children are finding it hard to stay seated in front of a screen for prolonged periods.
- Anxious children are struggling with the social demands created by the nature of virtual learning platforms.
- Your patience and words of encouragement will help your child cope with changes in expectations created by this pandemic.

USE POSITIVE PARENTING STRATEGIES

It is vital that you approach your child's online learning from a positive parenting perspective. Positive parenting has been found to have several positive effects on children, especially when it comes to increasing their emotional control and regulation skills (Eisenberg et al., 2005). The most important aspect of positive parenting is to ensure your child feels proud of their accomplishments, no matter how small.

Below are some strategies you can use daily. The following suggestions are adapted from an evidence-based intervention, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), which promotes positive interactions between parents and children (Eyberg & Funderbunk, 2011).

Use specific labeled praise

When using positive, specific language to praise your child's behavior, the effects are twofold. First, your child will know exactly which of their behaviors you approve of. Second, this will increase the likelihood that your child will engage in positive behaviors again in the future. As an added bonus, your child will feel better about themselves and likely enjoy the attention that you are giving them. Here are some examples of labeled praise that you can use:

- "Ian, good job completing your math homework."
- "I love to see you answering your teacher's questions."
- "Omar, you are showing me that you are a wonderful student by sitting on your seat and paying attention to your teacher."
- "Thank you for following your teacher's directions and completing this assignment."
- "Oliver, I love how you write the letter T so carefully."
- "Amelia good job raising your hands when you want to participate."

Reflect or paraphrase the positive things your child says

For example, when your child says, “I read for 20 minutes,” you can reflect their words by saying, “You read your book for twenty minutes!” When children feel like you are listening to them, they will communicate more.

Another example you may come across is when your child says something like, “I am tired of doing this math worksheet.” Statements such as these may sound like a complaint. However, the positive aspect is that they are expressing how they are feeling by using appropriate words. You can help them feel heard by reflecting their words, “I know, you are tired of doing your math worksheet. You have been working so hard.”

Describe your child’s positive behavior

Describing your child’s positive behaviors will further reinforce these behaviors. By doing this, you are showing your children that you are interested in their actions. When using behavior descriptions, you are providing your child with a brief description of what they are currently doing. Additionally, you are providing them with your full attention. Behavior descriptions can help to build your child’s self-esteem. Here are some examples of behavior descriptions that you can use:

- “You are reading your book.”
- “Jacob, you just answered a question in class!”
- “You logged in all by yourself!”
- “Grace, you turned your camera on.”



Show enjoyment during interactions

Express your enjoyment through the tone of your voice, laughter and positive touch. Consciously showing enjoyment while interacting with your child will make communication a more enjoyable and positive experience for you both.

Minimize engaging with your child's negative, attention-seeking behavior

As children struggle with certain aspects of remote learning, they may complain, whine, or refuse to do certain tasks. These are examples of minor attention seeking behaviors. When your child is engaging in these behaviors, it is important to ignore these behaviors and instead praise the behaviors they are doing that you like. For example, while Ben is completing his worksheet he turns to dad and yells, "I hate school!" In response, Ben's dad can ignore his yelling and praise Ben for completing his worksheet instead.

As soon as your child engages in the positive opposite of the problem behavior, make sure to praise them. In Ben's case, his dad would praise him for speaking in a calm tone of voice as soon as he does so.

Model appropriate behavior for your child

When your child is off-task, you can model or demonstrate the behavior you would like to see. This may shift your child's attention to what you are doing and will result in them imitating your behavior. Here is an example of how you can do this if your child leaves their work space:

- Your child removes themselves from the computer while the teacher is engaging with the class. They then begin playing with a toy. In this situation, you can:
 - Sit by their computer and describe some aspect of what is being taught in the classroom.
 - Use an enthusiastic voice while describing what you are seeing on the screen. You can say something such as, "Gosh, I never knew that hummingbirds are the only birds in the world that can fly in all directions!"
 - This will redirect your child and encourage them to come back to class because you made it sound more exciting.
 - Upon hearing this, your child may return to see what you see on-screen.
- As soon as your child returns, you can praise them for doing so. "Matt, thank you for coming back to pay attention to your lesson."
- You can also try pairing this with a behavior description. For example, when your child comes back to the screen, you can say, "Great job attending class. I know you're ready to work because you're sitting on your chair and looking at the

Premack Principle

Another strategy that you can use with your child is the Premack Principle (Premack, 1959). This theory states that a behavior someone chooses to do on their own will reinforce a less-preferred behavior (Jaspers et al., 2007). In other words, you can use a behavior that your child really enjoys doing in order to motivate them to do tasks that they may not want to do as much.

For example, your child may enjoy drawing or making art in their free time. If your child is asked to do a specific assignment that they do not enjoy (e.g., reading, math problems, a project, etc.), you can remind them that as soon as they're done with the assignment, they can work on drawing. This gives your child something to work towards, making the "not-so-fun" activities easier to get through.

Behavior Chart/Reward Ideas

Finally, if your child needs additional support, don't hesitate to start a behavior plan. At the start of the pandemic, our team at Sunfield Center produced a video which describes an effective behavior plan. This plan, the Cooperation Chart, was created by Dr. Cheryl McNeil. Follow the link below where you can view the Cooperation Chart video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvMY-frVfxw&feature=emb_logo

You may also download a PDF document (link below), which includes instructions on how to implement the Cooperation Chart. The PDF guide also provides a list of rewards you can use to reinforce your child's positive behaviors.

<http://sunfieldcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Cooperation-Chart.pdf>



DESIGNATE A LOCATION

In addition to having a solid routine, it is also important that your child has a designated space where they will engage in remote learning. Ideally, this location should be free of distractions, allowing your child to focus on their schoolwork (Gallagher et al., 2014). We recommend that you consider the following when identifying an adequate location:

- Have a specific desk or table where children can complete their school work.
- Set up a designated “cozy spot” where they can sit or lay while engaging remotely. You can adapt your child’s seating if necessary.
- Make sure that your child has the supplies they will need for remote schooling. This will reduce the number of times that they have to get up to look for things.
- Provide your child with headphones if they will be sharing a space with others.

CREATE AND STICK TO A DAILY ROUTINE

One of the most important things you can do for your child is to stick to a daily routine. A predictable routine helps to:

- Let children know what they can expect to happen each day.
- Make transitions easier for you and for your child.
- Support your child’s positive behaviors and minimize problem behaviors.



The following components are essential elements to incorporate in your daily routine:

Make sure that your child is well-rested

In order to start the school day on a positive note, it is important that your child is well-rested and ready to learn in the morning (Dewald et al., 2010). Make sure your child is getting enough sleep by providing them with a consistent bedtime routine. Using an alarm clock ensures that your child wakes up at the same time every day.

Make sure your child is well-fed

Children should also be well-fed. This guarantees that they are not hungry and allows them to better engage in learning activities. Children are not always able to recognize and communicate that they are feeling hungry. When hungry, you may find that your child becomes irritable and refuses to do things they are told to do. Make sure to provide them appropriate fuel during their learning hours to improve their engagement and ability to learn.

- Make sure your child eats breakfast
- Provide a snack in the early morning, about 1-2 hours after they have eaten breakfast
- Provide lunch approximately 1-2 hours after their morning snack
- Offer your child an afternoon snack again 1-2 hours after they have eaten lunch

Physical movement breaks

We all know that physical activity is an important aspect of a child's development. In addition to the physical health benefits of exercise, studies show that children are better able to focus after engaging in physical activity (Drolette et al., 2014; Norris et al., 2020). If your child's teacher provides movement breaks during the day, encourage them to get up and move during those times. Additionally, make sure that you encourage your children to run and move during breaks (ideally outside) at least two times a day.

- If you have more than one child, try to coordinate their schedules so that you can take them outside at least twice during the learning portion of the day.
- It helps to give these breaks specific names so that children learn what to expect during those times (e.g., morning and afternoon recess).

If you find that your child's teacher does not provide consistent breaks, talk to them about working a few in. You know your child best and what will work for them. Use your knowledge and share it to promote their success.



Create a and display a visual schedule

To help make your routine clear and predictable, we recommend creating a visual schedule that incorporates all of the important elements of a successful routine (Ganz, 2007; Banda et al., 2009). Make sure that you:

- Start off each day by reviewing the daily schedule with your child. This will make it easier to stick with an effective routine during virtual learning.
- Place the visual schedule in a location where both you and your child can easily see it.
- If needed, you can adapt your visual schedule even further by turning it into a checklist that your child can use to mark off as they progress through the day.

Use the graphics provided at the end of this document to create your own visual schedule. Simply print, cut and use. You can make changes and tailor it specifically for your child.

Using a timer may help you and your child keep track of your schedules. A timer can also help children stay on task for longer periods of time.

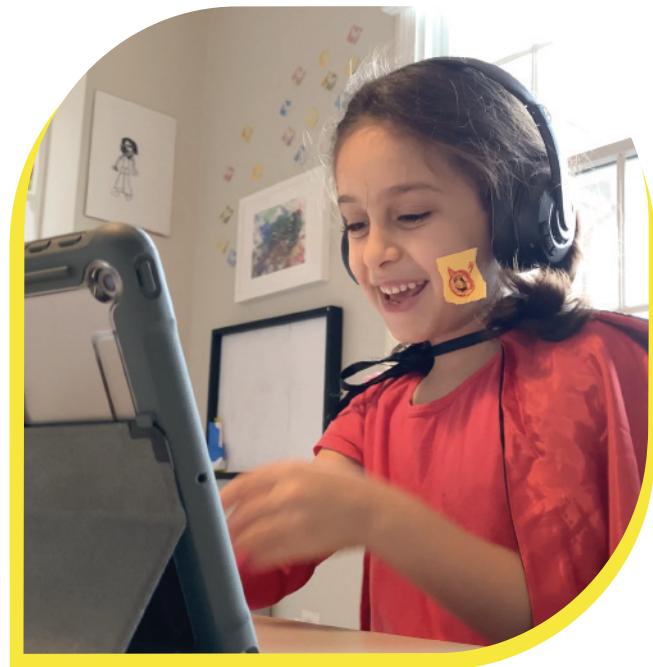
- If your child struggles with attention and focus, they may benefit from having a visual timer so that they can see time passing. For example, if they are expected to read for 15 min, you can set the visual timer to help them stay focused until the timer ends.
- Here are some links to visual timers:
<https://www.online-stopwatch.com/classroom-timers/>
<https://www.visnos.com/demos/classroom-timer>
<https://toytheater.com/classroom-timer/>

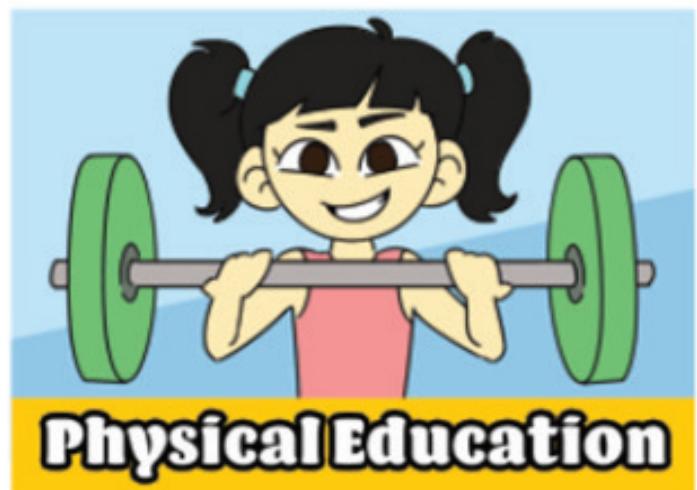
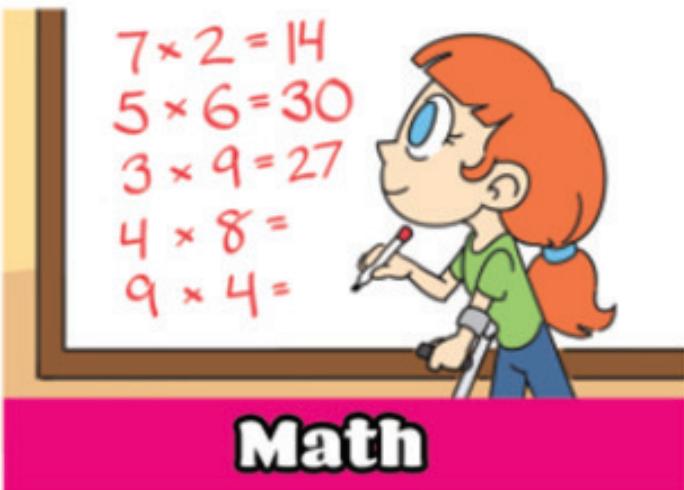
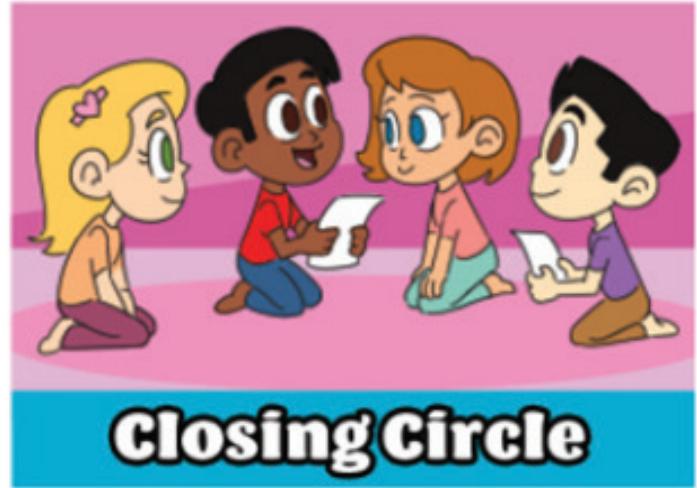
We hope that you find these strategies useful as you navigate remote schooling. Remember to be patient with yourself and your child. Try your best each day to balance the demands of remote learning with your child's need for play and downtime. When you apply these strategies consistently, you will foster a more positive, supportive and nurturing environment for your child which will help to reduce stress and make learning easier.

Remember that we are in this together. Many parents are experiencing higher levels of stress that may be impacting their own mental health and ability to support their children. This may be particularly true for parents whose children received 1:1 support in the classroom prior to covid-19, and now find themselves having to fill those shoes.

We encourage you to continue to communicate with your child's teacher, principal or school team to share your concerns and if you need additional support, reachout to a psychologist in your area.

From Dr. Dixon, myself and the Sunfield Center team, we wish you and your families a safe and peaceful school year.







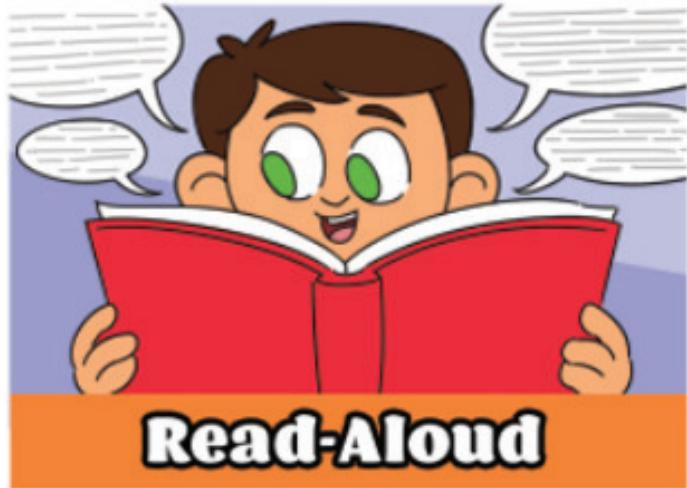
Social Studies



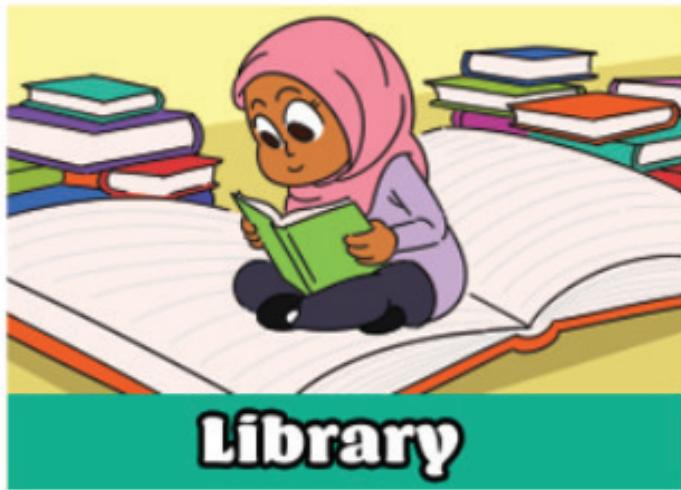
Music



Art



Read-Aloud



Library



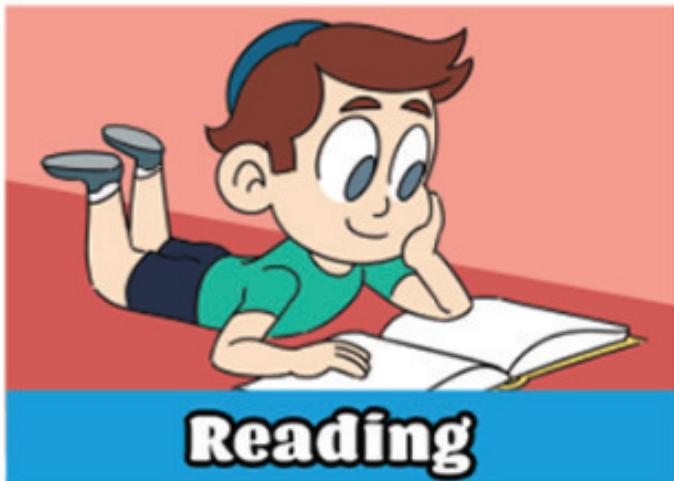
Independent Work



Science



Morning Snack



Reading



Afternoon Snack



Writing



Lunch





REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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