



8 Tips to Transition Your Student to the New On-Line Academic Environment

As schools switch to online lessons, students may struggle to adapt to unstructured days and the new, technology-dependent approach. Here are a few strategies to support this transition:

1. Create a schedule.

Kids need structure in their day; at school everything from testing times to meal times are carefully planned. Work with your student(s) to build a schedule you can all agree to follow. Ideally, this should include a consistent wakeup time as well as set meal times. Block off specific hours for schoolwork but also for free time and play. Try to keep weekends free of schoolwork to help break up the week and provide differentiation. While your student is adjusting, post the schedule somewhere visible so everyone stays on the same page. Especially in the beginning, consistency will be key!

2. Design a study space.

If possible, dedicate a specific room or area of the house as the "School Room." Ask your student to help set up their new study space to give them agency in their new routine and ensure it has everything they need (calculator, worksheets, chargers, etc.). Encourage them to choose a room that is not their bedroom. The most productive spaces are generally clutter- and distraction-free. Keeping the space neat will be the responsibility of the student. However, setting clear guidelines beforehand about the noise volume and technology use in the room will help establish that it is for studying only.

3. Build a System of Accountability.

Work together to build a system of joint accountability within which you and your student both know what is expected of them. This can take the form of To-Do Lists which are discussed by you and your student at the beginning and end of each day or deadlines written on a communal board in the kitchen where everyone can see. You may experience some push-back from your student as the burden of responsibility moves from teachers to students. Agreeing early on about when and how check-ins will occur, and what consequences will be enforced, can help to smooth this transition.

4. Make Time for Fun!

Without the usual activities and changes of scenery, building in time for fun will be important for productivity and mental health. In addition to the usual 5 minute break for every 20 or 30 minutes of studying, longer periods of unstructured free time should be scheduled and protected. Urge your student to leave their study space and do something fun (video games, FaceTiming friends, etc.). Weather permitting, encourage them to spend time outside each day playing in the yard or taking a walk around the block. These breaks are as important as their studying, so try to avoid using them as rewards or punishments.

5. Study Together.

In addition to providing students with an education, schools are also a large part of most children's communities. Not being able to interact with friends each day can feel isolating and add to anxiety. So long as the teacher permits, and your student can do so productively, allow students to form study groups and work together on assignments. Discussing new material, reviewing it aloud, and explaining it to others helps reinforce difficult concepts and provides the critical thinking skills usually used in a classroom setting. Alternately, siblings can work on different tasks at the same time in the same room.

6. Minimize Distractions.

While technology will be necessary to complete online lessons, it can easily move from productive to distracting. Set rules with your student regulating which devices are permitted in their study area. For example, they may bring in their laptop but must leave their phone in their bedroom. iPhones' built in Screen Time settings can help to regulate how much time can be spent on each app and several other web programs such as Self Control and RescueTime block chosen websites for set amounts of time and monitor productivity.

7. Stay Up-to-Date.

It is easy to fall behind when assignments are not being brought into school each day and, once behind, students may feel overwhelmed trying to catch up. It will be important, therefore, to complete daily assignments the day they are assigned rather than the day they are due.

8. Extend Grace.

This is likely a big transition for your family and, as with any significant change, there will be setbacks. Anxiety about Covid-19, paired with close quarters and major lifestyle upheavals, may leave tempers shorter than usual. It is ok if not every day goes according to plan and not everything scheduled is completed. Mental health days are valid and important. As much as possible, try to extend grace to yourself and those around you. You are all doing your best under very difficult circumstances.

Summary

Transitioning from in-person to online schools is going to be a work in progress for your students and their teachers. Some kinks will only be worked out with time but, in the interim, there are several ways you can support your students. The main goal is to help them establish a sense of structure and normalcy - encourage them to get dressed in the morning, work with them to build a schedule, create a school-like atmosphere during study times. Plans created during the first week may need to be adjusted as students settle into new routines. Most importantly, maintain open and honest communication so that expectations are clear and misunderstandings avoided.



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