TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT VIRTUAL LEARNING

It will not surprise you to learn that studies consistently show the importance of parent involvement in supporting student success. This is true for both face-to-face courses and virtual courses. Simply put, virtual schools work better when parents take an active role in their student's education.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that now is an especially challenging time for parents to support student learning at home. Parents are dealing with a wide range of stressors and balancing home and work lives. Also, for many of us, supporting a student's virtual learning is entirely new. Below we offer a set of recommendations for helping parents support their student's virtual learning.

The acronym STOIC describes five key elements of effective classroom management and school-wide behavior strategies to support student learning (Sprick et al., 2009). STOIC provides a useful and efficient framework for parents, teachers, and school leaders that include face-to-face instruction, e-learning, or hybrid learning models. Keep in mind these suggestions are aspirational; no one can do all of these strategies all the time. We suggest that you read them over and choose one or two ideas each day or week that you want to incorporate into your routine.

Structure (provide predictability, clear expectations, and an effective workspace)
- Set up a <u>clutter-free and quiet work area</u> for your student and make this their "go to" daily workspace; personalize and organize your student's workspace for fun and to encourage learning.
    - Limit distractions in your student's workspace i.e., away from TV, games, etc. as possible within your home
    - Remind your student to turn their cell phone on silent and leave it in another part of the home during class.
- Create a <u>daily schedule</u> for your student's learning on-line, consider creating a visual (a chart or calendar) that can be referenced so you and your student know what is expected each day
    - Good schedules include morning (wake up time, breakfast) and evening routines (bathing and bedtimes) in addition to specific learning and break times.
    - Set <u>age-appropriate expectations</u> for how long the student should engage in independent work. Set a timer and praise or encourage them at the end of completed segments (or more often as needed to build stamina) for sticking with it. Older students may be able to work continuously in 45-60 minute chunks before taking short breaks whereas younger students may need to start in small 5-20 minute chunks before needing breaks.
    - Build in opportunities for rest and physical activity during online learning. Providing snacks at these times as you are able may help students remain focused while completing their work.
    - Treat each item on the schedule as an appointment; **Stick to it!**
- Review assignment expectations and break them down into small steps for your student
    - Review required material list with your student and ensure that all learning materials are readily available
    - Use a calendar to help your student visualize assignments, due dates, etc.

- **Dress for Success!** Have students dress like it is a normal school day or what has been approved by your student's principal
- Ensure age-appropriate technology is working; e.g., student's laptop/tablet/computer is ready to go, internet is working
    - Should your student need assistive technology, ensure that is working, i.e., read aloud technology
- Discuss relevant student Individualized Education Plan components or 504 Accommodations with your student's teacher
    - Talk with your student's teacher about their Individualized Education Plan or 504 accommodations as needed

Teach – (use these strategies before or after the teacher is teaching)

- Understand when helping your student is appropriate or when they should receive direct instruction from their teacher.
- Allow for breaks between lessons.
- Help your student create "virtual fieldtrips" to promote interest and engagement.
- If you are not available the entire time, consider asking another adult or older sibling to be available for support
- Review assignment expectations and break them down into manageable steps for your student
- Take note of specific strategies that maybe helpful for your student with assignments and utilize all possible school resources as needed, for general education students as well as students with IEPs and 504s.
- Check in with your students regularly to ensure they are understanding the material
- **Boost self-motivation.** An online program provides students with great flexibility, but with flexibility comes responsibility. Even though some students are very self-motivated, parents need to encourage this and work with students to be accountable without a teacher literally looking over their shoulders.
- Remind your student that you are a team, and that you will get through it together!
- Allow your student to ask questions and provide comments
- Become familiar with different ways to present information to students (lecture, videos, reading, discussion, practice, games) and try to use a variety of these methods when teaching concepts to students**.**
    - Develop fun activities that complement concepts being taught, i.e., funny videos, treasure hunts, etc.
- Do your best to learn about the online platform your student will use so that you can help them if needed.
- At the end of an assignment, Zoom meeting, etc., talk with your student about what they learned by asking questions. For example, "what was today's lesson about, what was the objective, were you able to stay focused, how did you participate, what do you have to do next, what did you like about class?"

Observe— (closely monitor your student's behavior and progress)

- If you are working from home, consider having your student's/student's workspace near yours.

- Check on your student's progress and online engagement.
- Ask your student's teacher which subject areas or skill sets that your student may struggle with and provide additional support as you are able
- Be proactive and remove any barriers to learning your student may encounter (distractions, missing materials)
- Online school be similar to in-person school. The workload for online and offline classes should be the same. Online classes are not meant to be easy or unchallenging.
- Talk with your student's teacher to discuss how your student is doing as needed.
    - Communicate (calls, emails, zoom, text) with teachers regularly to learn about what your student is doing well and what they may need help with.
    - Ask teachers their preferred method and frequency of communication

Interact Positive— (provide more positive than negative interactions)
- To help reduce your frustration, talk to another adult so that your student does not hear and experience your angst
- Reach out to your student's school counselor for strategies to assist you with supporting your student with any concerns you may have
- Encourage your student(s) to seek help before a little problem becomes a big problem and encourage communication with their teacher outside of on-line instruction time.
- Remove barriers that might be causing anxiety for you and your student
- Some programs offer **free tutoring services. Parents should encourage students to** explore all options before allowing the student to give up.
- Focus on the positives. Sharing negative words about the teacher, the assignment, and/or on-line learning may negatively influence and impact your student's attitude
- **Parents/guardians** are integral to helping students learn time management and prioritization skills, both of which are essential for success in an **online** program. Parents should help students write to-do lists, keep track of their calendars, check progress and schedule their time wisely
- Interact positively with your students teachers and be aware of assignment due dates and scheduled testing/assessments. Remind students of important dates, ask if they have completed specific assignments, and if they are "ready for that exam".
- Discuss **academic integrity** and have open discussions about on-line cheating and the consequences
- **Help students feel connected to their teacher.** Many students are too shy or embarrassed to raise their hands in a traditional classroom and so may support in learning how to communicate in a virtual classroom. Ask teachers if there are ways the student can connect with them outside of class-time.
- Parents should encourage open communication and nurture close and trusting relationships with their student.
- **REMEMBER:** Your student will more than likely handle the on-line learning experience the way you do. Keep in mind that it is about the student, not the work.
- **Reminder:** When the microphone is on, the entire class can hear anything that you say in your home, while your student's microphone is "unmuted"

Correct Fluently— (provide simple, brief, unemotional corrective feedback when needed)

- Approach your student's learning environment positively
- If your student is easily distracted, use a timer to help them stay on task; i.e., "Work on these math problems for 5 minutes and then you can take a break. I'll start the timer. Ready, go."
- Ensure that your praise is authentic, specific, and sincere; i.e., "I really liked the way you focused on your math assignment and you didn't have to take a break before the timer sounded."
- When correction is warranted, do so in the following manner:
  - Stay calm and speak in a matter-of-fact tone
  - Be consistent and predictable—your child should know which behaviors you will correct and know that you will do it each time they need a reminder for it
  - Be brief—"Finish these problems" without providing a rationale or long explanation.
  - Teach or reteach appropriate behavior
- Parents/guardians play an important role in their student's academic success, regardless of how the instruction is delivered. After all, parents are their student's learning role models, so be sure to wield that power with caution and help inspire positive thinking toward education. Offer your support and encouragement, and be sure to turn to the experts (teachers and tutors) when you are out of your league. Asking your student what they learned and encouraging them to teach you something particularly interesting can help support their learning. See: https://www.wherelearningclicks.com/5-questions-answered-how-can-parents-help-with-online-learning-success/