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*Simple strategies to
support your kids' and
teen's remote learning*



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Tips to Promote Focus Online



ESTABLISH A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE

The brain likes predictability, otherwise it reverts to what is 'easy' or familiar. Establish a daily plan of what subjects/activities your child or teen will complete each day will help to plan their online time. This may also enable you to distribute shared digital devices amongst family members. A daily plan may assist in mitigating potential Internet bandwidth issues, so not everyone is trying to do simultaneous Zoom calls on video at the same time. If you're a working parent, you might try to map your demanding or mentally-taxing work activities to your child's remote learning activities or free time where they're less likely to require your attention or supervision. Have a clear plan so your kids know when it's time for *learning* and *leisure*. Depending on your child you may like to have leisure tech breaks interspersed throughout the day, or perhaps have them at set times of the day, or perhaps leisure-based tech activities at the end of the day once school work is completed- do what works best for you and your child/teen.



WORK IN SPRINTS, NOT MARATHONS ONLINE

The brain is easily distracted online and energy supplies are quickly depleted as it is taxing to process the many visual and auditory elements. Do not expect your child to do a 6-hour day online. As a general rule, primary-aged students should work for no more than 20 minutes online (age-dependent) before having a break (even if it's just a micro-break) and secondary students should spend no more than 30-40 minutes online before having a break.



DISABLE DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS

the persistent ping of social media notifications, or alerts to signal new posts on communication boards, or unexpected Houseparty calls with friends and family will compromise your child's capacity to pay attention (whether they're working online or offline). When completing work turn off all alerts and notifications on devices and activate Do Not Disturb or Airplane Mode. Keep digital temptations (gaming consoles, phones) out of sight when you need to study or learn online- just seeing them can hijack their attention.



BACKGROUND MUSIC

research confirms that appropriate background music can help students to focus. Music must meet three criteria to help students focus- soft, slow (imitate resting heart beat of approximately 60-80 beats/minute) and familiar lyrics. It doesn't need to be classical music. Focus



LOOK FOR SIMPLE DESIGN if your school hasn't provided recommended links to websites, apps or online activities, look for online tools that have a simple design. Too many bells and whistles on a website or app can divert a student's attention and they tend to focus on the embellishments, rather than the educational content. Want to check if apps or websites are appropriate for your children or teens use these tools these are my go-to resources:

[Common Sense Media](#)

[eSafety Commissioner](#)

Want step-by-step instructions on how to use apps, games and social media platforms in safe ways:

[SAFE ON SOCIAL TOOLKIT](#)

[THE CYBER SAFETY LADY](#)

Tips to Support Physical Health



SCHEDULE 'GREEN TIME' EACH DAY

sunlight, particularly between 8am-12pm will help to regulate your child's circadian rhythm which helps with their sleep (which may be impacted because of the increased exposure to blue light from screens) and helps minimise possible eye damage (developing eyes need 10 to 15 hours per week for healthy visual development).



CORRECT ERGONOMICS

Ensure devices are being used in ergonomically correct ways. Small handheld devices such as tablets and handheld gaming consoles can be used by children lying on their stomachs as it keeps the neck in a neutral position and they'll reposition themselves as they don't like to lay on elbows for long periods of time.



20-20-20-20 RULE

every 20 minutes your child uses a digital device, they should take a 20-second (minimum) break, look at something 20 feet (approximately 6 metres) away to develop the depth of vision and blink at least 20 times to help lubricate the eyes.



AVOID BRIGHT LIGHTS

Using laptops and tablets in direct sunlight, near windows with a lot of bright light, or under fluorescent lights places additional strain on the eyes.



NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES

your child/teen should be wearing noise-cancelling, earmuff style headphones, as opposed to earbud style headphones. Reduce maximum levels on headphones as most can reach 130 decibels and safe levels for developing ears are between 65 and 75 decibels.

Do you have the correct posture?

1 Elbows
Above the desk, at 90-110 degrees

2 Shoulders
Relaxed as opposed to hunched

3 Wrists
In line with forearms

4 Hips, Knees, Ankles
At 90 degrees whilst seated

5 Feet
Flat on the ground or footrest
For prolonged standing, consider a mat

6 Head
Upright with ears aligned with shoulders

7 Eyes
Looking at the top third of the screen.
Consider the use of a laptop raiser with your laptop

8 Seat length
Should be long enough to provide support beneath thighs

9 Backrest
Angled at 90-110 degrees with adequate lumbar support in line with lower back

10 Keyboard and Mouse
G and H of keyboard aligned with your nose. Mouse gripped loosely

If you're using a laptop:
Used with a riser, external keyboard and external mouse

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Tips to Support Mental Wellbeing



DON'T BOOKEND THE DAY WITH TECH

waking up and diving into WhatsApp messages, or gaming chat rooms, or social media, or news sites can negatively impact our teen's mood (and ours too). If young children wake up and go straight into watching fast-paced cartoons or silly YouTube channels this can overstimulate their sensory and nervous system and cause 'techno-tantrums' when they need to unplug and start the day. Social or stimulating screen activities can activate the limbic system which triggers the fight, flight or flee response. Encourage your teen to delay checking social media until after breakfast in the morning and have a digital bedtime (at least 60 minutes) before they go to bed to help their brains and bodies 'log off' and wind down.



GET THEM MOVING research confirms that sedentary behaviour is often linked to poor mental health outcomes. Factor in time each day for physical movement. Our kids may have significantly less physical activity if there's no longer a morning tea and lunch break in their day and spending more time on devices for both leisure and learning. Schedule in both extended periods of time for movement and also look for incidental physical movement bursts throughout the day as you transition between activities.



HAVE A DIGITAL BEDTIME & A LANDING ZONE

establish a time when devices need to be switched off each night and have a specific place in the house where digital devices go to be charged overnight. Sleep is vital for your child's cognitive function, immunity and mental wellbeing.



USE TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT WITH THEIR PEERS AND FAMILY

video-chat technologies like FaceTime, Zoom and Google Hangouts can be a great way for the connection kids and teens crave with their peers and family members. For younger students, can they ring a family member and read to them, or interview them for their project, or play Chess online or complete an online crossword? For teenagers, social media can be a vital tool for connection during this period of social isolation.



PROMOTE PHYSICAL TOUCH @ HOME

children, teens and spouses respond favourably to physical touch. When we touch someone the brain releases oxytocin, the social bonding hormone. Given that stress levels are likely to be high during self-isolation, safe touching, such as cuddles, rough-and-tumble play, rubbing shoulders or arms can help your young person feel safe and secure and release positive neurotransmitters that will help elevate their mood. Bonus tip- physical touch also helps to disperse arguments with partners which may also have increased because of self-isolation.



DISCONNECT FROM YOUR DEVICES AND CONNECT WITH YOUR KIDS

as a working parent I understand that we need to be responsive to emails, phone calls and communication tools. However, our young people need us to connect to them *without* digital distractions vying for our attention. Are their pockets of time where you can silence your phone, or put the laptop away? Could you have lunch together, go for a run or play a game together?

Tips to Keep them Safe Online



INSTALL INTERNET-FILTERING TOOLS

now, more than ever, it's imperative that you've set up parental controls and restrictions on *all* Internet-enabled devices your children and teens use, including the Smart TV. I personally use and recommend the **Family Zone**. They're currently providing their Insights tool for free, or 10% off their regular pricing via this [link](#). The Insights tool provides a great first step for those looking into parental controls but don't want to enforce restrictions or filtering just yet. Instead, it provides visibility of how your children/teens are using their devices.



MINIMISE SOCIAL MEDIA AND MESSAGE APPS @ NIGHT

the logical part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, that manages our impulses switches off at night and the limbic system which helps to regulate our emotions, switches on. This increases the chances that our kids may post images, videos or messages online that they may later regret, or may respond to predators or click on links that they shouldn't.



KEEP DEVICES OUT OF BEDROOMS

having access to digital devices in the bedroom can not only compromise sleep quality and quantity, but can also increase chances of cyberbullying, exposure to pornography or predators.



AVOID USING SCREEN TIME AS A REWARD OR PUNISHMENT TOOL

emotions are likely to be heightened over the social isolation period and it may be tempting to 'punish' our kids for their frustrating or inappropriate behaviour by 'banning' them from their favourite game or confiscating their beloved device. Please don't. Our kids and teens won't come to us when there's an online problem (exposure to pornography, cyber-bullying etc) if there's any perceived threat of digital amputation.