



Navigating Extended Time Away From School: Information for Families With Children Receiving Special Education Services

Supporting children with intellectual and developmental disabilities during extended times away from school and changing routines due to health outbreaks can be challenging. There are a number of strategies to use at home to help children settle into time away from school and into new routines, and to reduce worry and anxiety. The following strategies are universal, meaning they work for children with and without disabilities.

Strategies to Use During Extended Time Away From School

Strategies below were adapted from the documents and sites listed in the Resources section on page 4.

Help With Understanding the Situation

Use clear language to explain what is happening and let your child know he or she is safe.

- Use visual supports in the form of social narratives to make the situation clearer. This can be done with words or pictures to help them understand the need for good hygiene and how they may be feeling. Let them know their feelings are normal. Provide updates as the situation changes, such as how we wash our hands, and social distancing.

Resources: [Social Narrative: COVID-19](#); [Social Narrative: Coronavirus](#); [Social Narrative: Greeting People](#); [Social Narrative: Giving People Space \(Social Distancing\)](#); [Social Narrative: Giving People Space When Talking](#)

- Use a calendar or visual supports to help communicate the passage of time in terms of days, weeks, or months for children who have difficulty understanding time. Use visual timers (kitchen timers, TimeTimer®) or countdown timers (watch on a tablet or PC).

Resources: [Visual Support: Hand Washing \(Clipart\)](#); [Visual Support: Hand Washing \(Photos\)](#); [Task Analysis: Hand Washing](#); [Creating Visual Supports and Social Narrative Apps](#); [Visual Support: Calendar Template](#); [Visual Support: Countdown Example](#); [Visual Support: Timer \(Using Sticky Notes\)](#); [Timer Apps](#)

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Keep Routines Consistent

It is important to provide predictability, especially in times of uncertainty.

- Keep self-care (bath time, brushing teeth, etc.), sleep, and meal routines consistent. Have your child help with household chores and daily living skills. Create a visual schedule such as marking activities on a calendar, creating a task analysis, or creating a list with the time activities will take place.

Resources: [Tips for Creating Task Analyses](#); [Task Analysis: Unload the Dishwasher](#); [Task Analysis: Make a Snack](#); [Task Analysis Template](#)

Make New Routines

There may be changes in your household such as your work schedule or need to care for other children. Siblings may be home and interacting with each other more often since the entire family may be confined to the home. New routines may be needed in order to ease unfamiliar and difficult transitions.

- Have a specific space for homework and structured activities such as an office or dining room table. Create a to-do list, checklist, or schedule for completing tasks. Set expectations such as completing a certain amount of school work before a preferred activity. An example might be to complete five math problems and then get ten minutes on a favorite iPad program or watching a favorite television show. Use a timer to stay on schedule.

Resources: [Visual Support: Example of a Daily Schedule](#); [Visual Support: Daily Schedule Template](#); [Visual Support: Example of a Daily Schedule \(Using Stickie Notes\)](#); [Visual Support: Daily Schedule Template \(Using Stickie Notes\)](#); [Visual Support: Weekly Schedule Template](#)

- Provide choices so the child feels a sense of control. The choices should be limited to two that are realistic and the choice should be honored. Choices can be presented throughout the day and will depend on the age and needs of the child.

Resources: [Visual Support: Choice Board of Inside and Outside Activities](#); [Visual Support: Weekly Choices and Goals Template](#)

- Use concrete terms to describe time when transitioning or while engaged in an activity. Saying “in a few minutes” is not meaningful to many children and having specific times (and seeing the timer) can help with predictability.

Resource: [How to Transition Off Screens](#)

- Access online educational resources which can support learning and keep children academically involved.

Resources: [Educational Resources for Kids](#); [Additional Activity Resources](#); [Educational and Movement Resources for Teenagers](#)



Offer Time for Communication and Expression

Children may be afraid, frustrated, or worried and express this through behaviors such as tantrums, withdrawal, or acting out. They may have a hard time expressing or talking about their feelings. Some activities may be helpful with communication and expression:

- Model positive communication, such as, “You can play your game after you pick up your toys” (versus “No, you can’t play games because you haven’t picked up your mess”). Most importantly, notice appropriate behavior (“Thank you for picking up your toys”).

Resource: [Communication Tools](#)

- Provide opportunities for the child to express feelings and reduce anxiety through creative projects and activities such as talking or having conversations, making a video or movie, writing activities, dancing, listening to music, and using augmented communication such as a tablet or pictures.

Resource: [Expression Activities](#)

Practice Coping and Relaxing Skills

Many children already have some strategies they use to reduce their anxiety and worry. Some of these activities might include using headphones to quiet the environment or listen to music, breathing deeply, counting to ten, exercising, or doing a favorite activity. When introducing relaxing activities, consider the following:

- Pick times of the day when your child is already calm to work on these skills. Use a visual routine to support relaxing strategies. Make sure he or she has access to the activity and schedule it regularly.

Resource: [Self-Management: Calming Routine](#)

- Teach self-management skills to help your child track when he or she is anxious and decide when calming strategies are needed.

Resources: [Self-Management: FACE COVID](#); [Self-Management: Reinforcement](#)

- Provide opportunities for physical activity to reduce anxiety. Set a regular routine for exercise. Create activities to keep the child physically active including the use of a device to count steps, taking a daily walk, or online workout applications.

Resources: [Inside and Outside Exercise Activities Choice Board](#); [Exercise Activities](#); [Mindfulness Apps](#); [Movement Resources for Kids](#); [Educational and Movement Resources for Teenagers](#)



Encourage Online Connections

Children may feel socially disconnected. Providing opportunities for social interactions with familiar people such as family, peers, neighbors, friends, and others may be helpful. This can be done with texting, FaceTime, Google Messenger, What's App, and other applications.

- Schedule time to talk online to others, participate in religious events, do homework, play games, and enjoy other activities to help your child feel connected socially.

Resources: [Task Analysis: Calling with FaceTime](#); [Task Analysis: Marco Polo for Video Chats](#); [Video Chat Apps](#)

Resources

- [Michigan Department of Education \(MDE\): Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Communications](#)
- [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\) for Parents: Using PBIS at Home](#)
- [Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center Visual Schedules & Resources \(teens and adults\)](#)
- [State Educational Technology Directors Association \(SETDA\): Parent Resources for eLearning](#)
- [Statewide Autism Resources and Training \(START\) COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University: At Home Activities & Resources](#)

