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September 2020

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Volume 9, Issue I

# Autism Agenda



### Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

Five ways parents can advocate for their child with autism in virtual learning

By Dr. Peter Faustino, Psy.D., and Dr. Kari Oyen, Ph.D. | July 29, 2020

When coronavirus shut school building doors across the globe, families with students of special needs, including many children with autism, were left with the question, "What now?"

The pandemic left little time to process and make educational plans that met the needs of students with individualized education programs (IEPs), as is typically done through annual reviews, program reviews, quarterly progress reports, updated assessments or informal discussions during school events.

While re-opening plans are still uncertain for many families in different regions in the U.S., remote, online learning (also called distance learning) may be a substantial part of the educational framework for this upcoming school year.

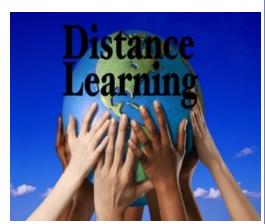
Here are five ways for parents to be heard:

I. Review your state education department's re-opening plan. Most (if not all) state re-opening plans have included a section to address Special Education. While these plans will not contain detailed directives for school communities, they will contain language that offers schools some flexibility with regard to certain groups of students. For example, New York's state guidance says, "Schools and school districts should consider in-person services a priority for high-needs students and preschool students with disabilities whenever possible and consider contingency plans developed by the CPSE/CSE to address remote learning needs in the event of intermittent or extended school closures." These guidance documents may shed light on the options and flexibility that parents may be able to request from schools for their children's learning needs as we navigate these unprecedented times.



### FIVE WAYS PARENTS CAN ADVOCATE CONTINUED....

- 2. Get involved with the committees that are planning for re-entry. The federal education department has strongly encouraged parent and student voices in the re-opening process. Most schools are conducting surveys, where the voices of parents of children with special needs are critical. If you missed any of these opportunities, be sure to craft an email and share it with district leaders so they can better understand your child's unique needs and how their planning can mitigate and reduce stress on your family. Be sure to communicate your needs and possible solutions to decision-makers. These decision-makers are most often the school and school district administrators and the local school board. Be sure to communicate to all parties who are at the table making educational decisions for children in your community.
- 3. Include and maximize "Parent Training" on your child's IEP. Most states are not considering virtual services a "change of placement," especially in cases where all students are home engaged in distance learning. However, school closures taught us that the lines between home and school are blurred. During the pandemic, the four walls of a school building do not dictate the provision of services. It takes a village to make this work and when the team is not able to be physically at your home with you, there may need to be some creative problem solving on how to provide services at a distance. In speaking with parents and professionals, consultation time became essential. Teachers, School Psychologists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physical Therapists were called upon to problem-solve home



behaviors, discuss daily schedules, support instruction, help develop assessments to measure progress and find creative ways to prevent regression. Be sure to incorporate parent training on the IEP to ensure that services can continue, even while your child is at home with you!

- 4. Learn the new e-learning vocabulary. Asynchronous vs. Synchronous, Flipped Classroom, Blended Learning... While the closures in March came as a surprise and many were in crisis mode to address physical safety, financial security and finding basic necessities, schools are now heavily engaged in a reflective process to improve distance learning this fall. This includes reviewing the research and literature on e-learning that existed prior to the pandemic. The school terms used frequently are:
  - asynchronous learning: anytime learning, where the work can be done anytime in advance of a due date
  - synchronous learning: real-time learning, generally on a live video platform and sometimes including an attendance requirement
  - <u>flipped classroom</u>: students watch recorded lectures for homework and complete their assignments, labs and tests in class
  - •blended learning: combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods

In planning for the fall, speak with your special education team about the right fit for your student. Keep in mind that students may not be able to regulate their "screen-time" and setting limits is healthy. Consider that multiple, shorter segments throughout the day and week may be better for your child's attention and learning.



Continued on page 3.

### FIVE WAYS PARENTS CAN ADVOCATE CONTINUED....

5. Listen to your child and conduct a self-assessment compared to the school plan. Think about how your child learns best. If there are glaring discrepancies, review the IEP with your school team. You can request a meeting to revisit your child's IEP anytime during the school year. Remember that an IEP is a contract between you and the school that outlines the strengths, needs, services, accommodations and modifications that help your child access the general education curriculum and classroom.

During the pandemic we are re-conceptualizing the classroom. What new challenges have arisen? What new strengths have you discovered? Do you need to incorporate some skills that help with safety? Mask-wearing? Social distancing? Handwashing? These times are new for all of us and can be quite confusing and scary for children with ASD. By intentionally addressing these concerns in a direct way with your school team, you can help ensure that your child and the staff that support them are safe in any environment.

It is important to note that this time is a significant change for all of us. It is important to define, acknowledge and validate those losses and disappointments (big and small) for your child (and for you!). Empower your child to identify the choices that they have, express their wishes the best they can and participate in things they can control and change.

If or when virtual learning becomes part of your day, be sure to set up routines and rituals in a distance learning environment. Have time during the day for school-based activities as well as time for home-based activities, including free play. Encourage your child to use an exploratory mindset where they think about the possibilities of remote instruction instead of all of the barriers. Be sure to encourage your child that if something is "hard" or doesn't go how they expect, and they have not mastered it "yet," they can still think creatively and come up with alternative plans. For some children, a distance learning format may be a very positive experience, so encourage them to consider the possible benefits of remote instruction.

Most importantly, be sure to create connections for both you and your child as you navigate these uncharted waters. Many parents and their children are experiencing the same types of questions, challenges and opportunities. Take the time to connect with others – and support connections for your child - to share the blessings as well as the challenges of trying to teach and learn amid a pandemic.

It takes a village to raise a child, and although we may be at a distance, this adage continues to hold true. Lean on the professionals and educators available to you to creatively help meet your child's learning needs.

https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/five-ways-parents-can-advocate-their-child-autism-virtual-learning

### REMOTE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

### Remote Learning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Covid 19 has brought a different way to access education. ISBE.Net has created a pdf full of supports for families to access and use to support their child in remote learning. In this pdf you will find support for understanding, support for behavior, opportunities for expressive communication, helps to socialize remotely, routines, tips for remote learning, helps for locating a space for remote learning and additional resources. Please access this pdf by cutting and pasting the link into your web browser.

https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Remote-Learning-Students-with-ASD.pdf

### SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

### Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times

(This article has interactive pages, to access please go to https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times. Once you are on the page click the links on the left. We have also included the PDF link at the end of this page.)

All children and young adults require support from caregivers during times of stress and uncertainty, such as those we are facing now with the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Coping with the unknown and navigating school closures, abrupt changes in routines, loss of connections with teachers and friends, and fear around contracting the virus- are burdens for all, and caregivers play an important role in helping children and young adults understand the changes and process their related feelings. Individuals with autism may need additional support to process the news and adapt to the many changes. This population may face additional challenges related to comprehension, communication, difficulty understanding abstract language, an insistence on sameness, and a greater likelihood of anxiety and depression—all of which may be exacerbated during this stressful period.

The following **7 support strategies** are designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism during this period of uncertainty. In addition, examples and ready-made resources are included to help caregivers implement these strategies quickly and easily. These materials purposely represent a variety of styles/designs/complexity to model the range of what may be most meaningful across ages and skills, and to demonstrate what can be generated with few materials by busy caregivers. Specific adaptations and additions may be necessary to best meet the varied needs of individual children and young adults.

These strategies are intended to be a menu or toolkit of ideas that may be helpful—caregivers may take one idea at a time and find a way to make it work for their child(ren) with autism and their family. Caregivers may want to start with a strategy they have used in the past, or perhaps find a tool to address the issue that is creating the most immediate stress. Consider involving the individual with autism in the decision-making process about what tools would be most helpful.

### 7 Strategies to Support Individuals with ASD through Uncertain Times

- 1. Support understanding
- 2. Offer opportunities for expression
- 3. Prioritize coping and calming skills
- 4. Maintain routines
- 5. Build new routines
- 6. Foster connections (from a distance)
- 7. Be aware of changing behaviors





Here is a link to the full pdf: https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/sites/afirm.fpg.unc.edu/files/covid-resources/ Supporting%20Individuals%20with%20Autism%20through%20Uncertian%20Times%20Full%20Packet.pdf

#### DISTANCE LEARNING TIPS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

### Distance Learning Tips for Children with Autism

By Allison Ratto, PhD.

Here are some things you can do to give your child with autism the most successful distance learning environment possible.

The thought of returning to distance learning this fall is intimidating for most families, and even more so if your child is on the autism spectrum. Fortunately, there are some things you can do to give your child with autism the most successful learning environment possible.

Distance learning tips for children with autism

- 1. Create a quiet, distraction-free space for your child to learn. Your child should use this space every day for schoolwork.
- 2. **Find a fun activity your child can look forward to each day.** Come up with a list of fun activities (other than screen time) for your child to choose from each day, like art or outside playtime. If possible, spend 10 minutes doing that one activity together.
- 3. **Set reasonable goals for your child.** It's okay if your child doesn't learn and do everything they normally would during the school year. Try to set goals that are achievable. If you make those goals then you can raise the bar.
- 4. Think about how to support your child's learning without making it your job to be their teacher. You're probably trying to juggle your job as well as your child's education, so don't attempt the impossible. You are not their teacher. Instead, think how you can best support their learning by:
  - Is there a quiet space in the house with less distraction?
  - How can you incorporate movement breaks into the day?
     The bottom line is that you should readjust your expectations you can't fully replace your child's teacher.
- 5. Go back to the basics. Figure out which of your child's needs you can best meet and focus on those first.
- 6. Advocate as much as you can. Set up meetings to discuss IEPs and 504 plans as well as distance learning accommodations as early as you can. Discuss things like reducing your child's workload and maximizing their time in I-on-I instruction.
- 7. **Be sure to continue with your child's medication**. If your child normally takes a stimulant for school, keep giving it to them online school is still school.

### It's okay to take a step back from school

Unfortunately, there are some children with autism for whom distance is just not feasible. Kids who are minimally verbal, need I-on-I instruction, are very developmentally delayed or who have significant sensory needs all fall into this category. If this is the case with your child, and you need to take a step away from the school system right now, then do it. Don't make your child sit in a room and watch Zoom all day if it's not working for them. Try looking at the schedule and choosing one or two short time periods during their day that have the most benefit to your child – for example one-on-one coaching or virtual speech therapy. Let the rest go!

There will be plenty of time in the future to meet your child's educational goals and it'll be much easier to come back from an educational or academic deficit than an emotional setback. If you have to make a choice between your child's physical/emotional well-being and their education, you should always choose their well-being.

https://riseandshine.childrensnational.org/distance-learning-tips-for-children-with-autism/

### 28 HOME LEARNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL IDEAS



### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

It may feel like it's *not enough* to teach as usual in these unprecedented times. Our students are—going through a confusing, scary, and confusing time of <u>distance teaching and learning</u>. The social-emotional component is more critical than ever. Therefore, everyone can use strategies, tactics, and activities that address social skills. Some are communication, cooperation, emotion regulation, empathy, and impulse control. Everyone is cooped up at home for an extended and unknown length of time. Therefore, it's a great time to explore social-emotional learning (SEL).

### Addressing CASEL 5 Core Competencies for Social-Emotional Learning

The <u>Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</u> highlights five essential areas for academic and relationship success. They are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. There are easy ways to incorporate social-emotional activities both in class or at home. Most importantly, be present, and take time to share with your kids. Help them develop these necessary skills with CASEL competencies to set them up for success.

- 1. Self-Awareness (understanding yourself) begins with recognizing and identifying emotions, needs, strengths, and limitations. For example, this involves managing anxiety, stress, and worry. Explore self-awareness by introducing emotional vocabulary. Teach kids how to model proper behavior. Mindfulness, as well as staying focused and on track, are also part of self-awareness. Having a growth mindset, along with the other factors, will result in self-confidence.
- **Using Children's Books** Find quality children's literature to <u>teach children emotional awareness</u>. Then, use <u>book activities</u> to engage, have discussions, and further their ability to express their emotions.
- **Scavenger hunt** Set up a scavenger hunt to work on attention, focus, and mindfulness. Focus on ways children can show responsibility at home.
- **Journaling** Instruct students to keep a special journal to record challenges and emotions, events, and memories. Encourage them to try to think of one positive thing each day. This self-regulation and mindfulness activity can also include writing prompts. Try our Feelings Journal to get you started!
- **2. Self-management** involves managing impulses, emotions, and stress. Discipline, motivation, resilience, and perseverance are also part of self-management. Help kids continue to build self-management skills at home with the following activities.
- **Help Others** Remind children that they can offer to do a favor or perform a chore for someone in their family. Make it a goal to work towards once per week, or perhaps every day!
- Morning Meetings Use Mind + Heart Morning Meeting slides to guide students in a virtual morning meeting to start your online class. This exercise will help them build self-management skills. Kids will enjoy connecting and sharing with their teacher and peers online.



Continued on page 7

### 28 HOME LEARNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL IDEAS CONTINUED.....

- 3. **Social awareness** is understanding others and their feelings and perspectives. It starts with acknowledging and appreciating that everyone is different. With this understanding, empathy and respect for others are essential steps in social awareness.
- **Empathy with movies** With distance learning and extended time at home, videos will likely be popular. Have students pause to discuss feelings, emotions, consequences, and other valuable concepts. These books and videos that encourage empathy provide helpful examples!
- Random Acts of Kindness Create a list of ways to be kind at home and then make a calendar of acts to complete in a month. Encourage students and their families to do them together.
- **Donations** Encourage students to collect unused toys and books to donate when this is all over.
- Connect with Others Be sure to address each child during your online chat by name. Encourage them to feel free to talk to you directly. For example, try to limit times when students must remain muted. Or, allow a few minutes at the beginning or end of your meeting with them to allow them to see and talk to each other. Share your email address and allow them to email you. Although it's hard, attempt to respond to each one personally. End the email with warm comments to let them know they are special and loved.
- 4. **Relationship Skills** There is a continued need to build relationships at home. Communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution are essential to healthy relationships in and out of the home. Successful role play, working in groups, and parent interaction will help develop relationship skills. Try these activities during distance learning to encourage kids to connect with family members and peers online.
- Paper Hearts Instruct students to cut out paper hearts. Have them
  write personal messages of thanks, kindness, or appreciation for others.
  They can leave them on the windows or front door for service workers to
  see. Alternatively, they could post them in their house for family members to find.
- Virtual "Playdates" Encourage families to connect their child online with a friend for a virtual chat on a
  platform, such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger Kids, or a Facetime call.
- Write & Send an Email After a short lesson on how to write an email, have kids write one to their teacher, a friend in the class, or a family member. They will enjoy getting an email message in return! An adult can also write an email message from a child.
- 5. **Responsible decision**-making involves thinking through the parts of a problem and identifying various solutions and consequences. Discussing and predicting situations with teachers or parents can help kids learn to analyze, evaluate, and reflect on their own. Most important is knowing how to make good decisions to be your best self.
- **Responsibility** Use this <u>Responsibility unit</u> to guide students in learning what responsibility means and how they can be responsible.
- **Confidence** Build your kids' confidence by having them practice making their own decisions. Encourage parents to refrain from running to the rescue every time there is a struggle. Remind them to focus on their strengths and nurture their unique skills and traits. Give them responsibility and set them up for success with achievable goals.
- **New Accomplishments Jar –** Every time the child accomplishes something new, have them write it down on a slip of paper and place in a special jar. After some time, encourage kids to share the entries to see the growth.

This is just a paraphrase of the full article. To view it and all of the wonderful examples they have shared please go to: https://proudtobeprimary.com/social-emotional-activities-distance-learning-at-home/



### **10 NETIQUETTE & REMOTE SCHOOLING NORMS**

### 10 Netiquette & Remote Schooling Norms Families Need to Know

By Courtney Dickinson

In this <u>era of remote schooling</u>, there are new tech platform norms and social coaching advice that we, as parents and educators, need to expressly spell out for our children. Framing "netiquette norms" and coaching how students can engage productively will support their success in on-line learning and social collaboration in a video classroom world. Students need explicit guidance to know how to bridge to this virtual world.

Being in a virtual classroom is a social experience and requires conscientious self awareness and self management. As is the case when students are together at school, there are many behaviors which can be inappropriate and risky; comments and actions can be misconstrued and backfire. Make it clear to kids that when they are not in person, there is an even *higher* risk that they will be misinterpreted by others. The following are netiquette norms that teachers can implement in online classes:

- **Location matters!** Find a spot in your home where lighting and sound work well, where you can be physically comfortable, and distractions are limited.
- Be dressed for class. You wouldn't wear pajamas to school on a regular day, so don't wear them now.
- Listen and avoid interrupting verbally or through chat, just as if you were sitting in the classroom. You might need to mentally "bookmark" your idea even longer than you would during an in-person discussion. Write it down so you don't forget it, and then insert it later when it fits.

Don't YELL by using capital letters, bold font, or excessive punctuations. You won't get the result you want. You will just make people feel annoyed at you, and then they may YELL back – which is unproductive – or not listen to you at all.

- Attempt to find your own answer. Take the time to read and reread directions
  and information in emails and other written messages. See if you can figure it out
  before asking for the answer. Believe in yourself!
- **Keep your writing in the "chat" function formal.** Textspeak can b gr8 4 ur friends, but in class your written communication should reflect proper writing style.
- Be respectful and kind. While it feels easier to say hurtful or disrespectful things
  when you are not standing face-to-face with someone, remember that your
  classmates and teachers are real people who are affected by the words you say
  and write.
- Think before you type. You can even say the words out loud before you send a response. Written communication is not the same as an in-person conversation because important cues like tone, body language, and immediate listener feedback are missing. Sarcasm can and will backfire.
- **Be forgiving!** This is different for everyone, mistakes will happen, and plans may not come together as intended. Pause to take a breath and be kind. You will be back in person with them, and you want to keep these friendships!
- Don't abuse the chat box and avoid using or changing your virtual backgrounds. If used at all, the
  chat box should improve the conversation, not distract from it. Changing the virtual background distracts
  others in ways that may feel fun to you but actually are just annoying to others. If what you really want is
  to connect with friends and laugh together, set up a video chat time to socialize at a non-class time!



Continued on page 9.

H=is it Helpful?

is it inspiring?

is it necessary?

### **10 NETIQUETTE NORMS CONTINUED...**

For <u>parents serving as the school-day facilitators</u> and monitors of your child's focus, accountability, and morale, there are home-based norms which you might consider as well:

- Keep habits and norms on a schedule at home with consistent wake up, meal and bed times.
- Expect that everyone in the house gets dressed every day.
- Have family meals whenever possible. Even historically snarky teenagers may actually really be craving conversation, even with uncool parents!
- Expect that everyone goes outside every day and, ideally, exercises every day.
- Limit the amount of discussion and newscasts about COVID to which your kids are exposed.
   They have even less reserve to process this than we do, as adults.
- Say "no" and shut off TV and video games with clear, firm, consistent limits when you see that too much screen time is eroding your child's mood, undermining their willingness to go outside, or distracting them from school work.



- That said, proactively help your child set up video chat meet-ups with their friends outside of school day hours. This additional "screen time" is valuable and worth it.
- It is difficult to support your child to stay engaged and to follow through and also to know when to "let them off the hook" and opt out of school for emotional wellbeing. Emotional well being and feeling connected with other people is far more important than any academic learning or growth right now. Without emotional health, no academic learning or growth can occur, anyways. Prioritize your kids' time this way. It's OK to say "yes" to video chatting with friends as more important than the on-line math tutorial program.
- Reach out to your child's teachers and school counselor to share your observations and kids' needs. The
  ways teachers and counselors monitor kids' wellbeing and engagement are no longer available to them,
  and they still worry and care. They may be able to set up additional supports if they know what you are
  seeing at home with your child.
- Assess if a child's behavior is truly problematic or if they are doing something which may be a coping
  mechanism. Try to understand what is at the core of your child's choices and behaviors when you
  intervene.

All the norms that make things work during in-person schooling still apply in this remote schooling world. The benefits of a clear and consistent daily schedule and rhythm top the list of things parents can provide their kids. For students, engaging with heightened awareness about how they impact others will be best supported by adults who convey how in-person social conventions and kindnesses translate into netiquette in the video chat world. Making things clear to them supports kids to feel safe and to know what to do to be successful.

https://www.aceraschool.org/10-netiquette-remote-schooling-norms-families-need-know/

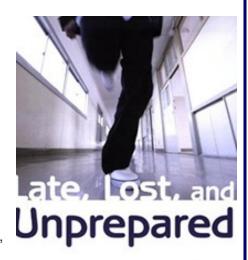


### **BOOK REVIEWS**

# LATE, LOST AND UNPREPARED

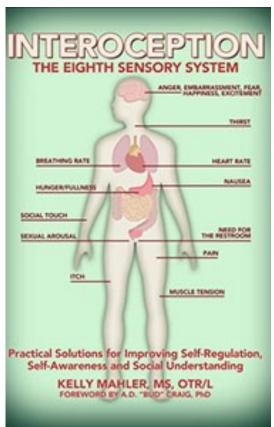
### Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Laurie Dietzel

This book is full of practical strategies and tips to support families and educators of children from elementary school through high school who are challenged by weak executive function skills. Despite their best efforts, children who struggle with executive function skills may need support in areas such as organization, impulse control, self-monitoring and working memory. Given the academic and social demands students encounter on a daily basis, this book is a must-have resource for parents and educators.



A Parents' Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning

Joyce Cooper-Kahn, Ph.D. & Laurie Dietzel, Ph.D.



### INTEROCEPTION: THE EIGHTH SENSORY SYSTEM

### **Kelly Mahler**

This book provides information to parents and professionals on the eighth sensory system, Interoception. The Interoceptive System allows individuals to understand signals from their body, such as hunger, thirst, pain, fear, etc. Many individuals with autism spectrum disorder are challenged with labeling how they are feeling internally. This book provides research as well as practical strategies to support individuals who struggle with self-regulation.

If you are interested in doing a book study on either of these books please go to: https://www.ocali.org/project/asd\_book\_studies.



### **VISUALS**



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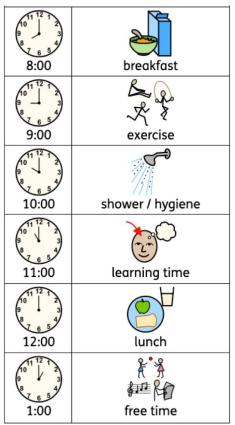
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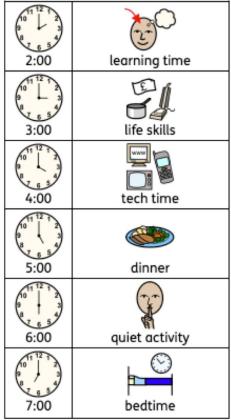
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## Home Learning Schedule





me 7:00
■ Breezy Special Ed •

