

# HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD DURING VIRTUAL LEARNING

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# MAXIMIZING THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

- Request shorter sessions to set them up for success
- Talk to the teacher or therapist ahead of time to be prepared for the lesson (have materials ready and easily accessible)
- Be prepared to redirect and prompt your child as needed (ask the teacher for guidance with this)
- Have a system of reinforcement in place, and follow through with it
- Keep it positive and successful; if your child is having a hard time, allow them to request a break and honor that. Return to learning when they are calm.

# ESTABLISH A PLACE FOR LEARNING

- Having a routine for learning time will help to reduce anxiety and increase the likelihood that your child will be able to focus and be engaged
- Use the same space for virtual learning, a designated spot for learning, just as they would have a table/desk at school where they associate this with instruction
- This helps to establish a boundary for your child, so they can understand when it is time for “school” and when it is time to play or relax.
- Keep this spot neutral and positive; it is important that they do not develop an aversion to this place
  - For example, use extra positive reinforcement when they are in this place, or isolate a special reinforcer for school time
  - Prompt them to take a break when they show signs of distress, and leave this space neutrally

# MAKING ACCOMMODATIONS

At school, special education teachers and assistants make accommodations all day long for your children; and you are already doing this, maybe without realizing it! Individuals with disabilities learn in a unique way; it's important to embrace that and willingly make accommodations to meet them where they are at. Instead of thinking, "They can barely sit for 5 minutes," try thinking, "How can I help them attend for a longer time?"

- Have materials and reinforcers easily accessible (every second matters, anticipate their next move so you can be ready to redirect them back to task as much as they need)
- Allow them to stand, give them a small area to pace in front of the computer if they need that, try making a special chair (add a pillow to sit on, a ball, or add a therapy band around the legs of the chairs for them to fidget with their feet.)
- If your child is included in a general education setting, reduce the amount of work they have to do (i.e. instead of a whole worksheet, they only do the odd numbers.)
- Use visual aids (a timer, a visual schedule, first-then, token boards) to reduce anxiety and increase reinforcement

# PROMPTING YOUR CHILD EFFECTIVELY

In the field of ABA, it is important to teach systematically and meet learners where they are at. One teaching strategy commonly used is Errorless Teaching, which requires prompting to ensure success. Over time, these prompts fade until the learner responds independently.

- The prompt hierarchy from most intrusive to least intrusive is as follows (we call this Most to Least prompting):
  - **Full Physical prompting** (or Manual Guidance)- the adult gently supports the learner hand over hand and responds with the learner
  - **Light Physical prompting**- the adult fades their support by guiding the learner at their elbow which allows the learner more space to respond
  - **Gestural prompt**- the adult points to the appropriate materials or places to guide the learner in the right direction without physical touch

Physical prompting allows the learner to develop a motor plan and can understand how to respond appropriately, while eliminating language and verbal instructions (this can reduce a lot of anxiety for learners.)

\*Always prompt from behind, and do your best to be “invisible”

# MORE ON PROMPTING

We use verbal prompting when teaching functional language and appropriate verbal responding (such as when teaching social skills!)

- **Full Verbal prompts-** the adult responds verbally with the phrase that the learner will repeat (i.e. adult says, “I need a break,” when the learner starts to fidget and whine; the learner will repeat “I need a break,” and be allowed to take a break.)
- **Partial Verbal prompts-** the adult begins to respond verbally, but does not complete the full word or phrase (i.e. adult says, “I need a \_\_\_\_” or “Br \_\_\_\_.”)

Verbal prompts are harder to fade than physical prompts, but are necessary when teaching functional language. It is important to try to fade verbal prompts, so that the learner does not **rely** on hearing them.

# HOW DO I KNOW WHAT PROMPT TO USE?

- For virtual learning sessions, ask the teacher what they recommend for each activity or lesson
- Sometimes it is best to prompt Most to Least (meaning, you start with full physical prompts and fade back as appropriate), and other times it is best to prompt Least to Most (meaning, you allow them to be independent, and if they need support, you provide a gestural prompt/point. If they still need support, you provide a light physical prompt, and if they are still unable to respond appropriately, you would use full physical prompting or full manual guidance.)
- If your child does not like to be touched, you will be using a lot of gestural prompts, and hopefully providing reinforcers when they respond appropriately

# SYSTEMS OF REINFORCEMENT

- Reinforcement simply refers to an increase in the likelihood of a behavior happening again in the future; if they do something you like, you want to reinforce that behavior so that it will happen again! Specific verbal praise can go a long way.
- Token boards are a common example of a positive reinforcement system for people with autism because they are a helpful visual that reminds the learner of what they are earning and how “close” they are from accessing it
  - You get to decide how fast or how frequently you give a token depending on your child and what the activity is
  - The more challenging the task, the faster you should give tokens; they will need more frequent reinforcement
  - Not all individuals understand the concept and relationship of a token board (token economy/trade in), so they would have to be trained to understand this before it would be helpful to them

# MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

## When your child gets upset during virtual teaching:

- Stay neutral; your energy greatly impacts the situation and can cause behaviors to escalate.
- Use “first-then” language. (i.e. “First school, then outside!”)
- Prompt appropriate functional language, such as:
  - “I’m mad, I need a break.”
  - “This is hard. I need help.”
  - “I don’t like this. But I can do it!”
  - “All-done”
- Knowing when to take a break is a HUGE, important skill. It is part of school, and essential for life! Practicing this is not a waste of time; and doesn’t reduce learning, it is critical.
- Provide positive reinforcement if they are successfully redirected with the absence of challenging behaviors (i.e.” You’re doing a great job sitting! You’re earning \_\_\_\_!”)

## OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

- Don't worry about the little things. Teachers understand and KNOW what it is like to support your child during instruction; they are in your corner!
- Record how long your child will sit/attend to instruction successfully (before getting upset, distracted, etc.) Tell the teacher this duration, and work to slowly increase it if need be.
- Communicate with your child's teacher regularly. Speak up if there is a highly preferred activity or non-preferred activity that they are doing. Perhaps they can send pre-recorded videos for instruction, or offer suggestions for other learning tools (such as educational apps or activities) to do at your leisure.

# QUESTIONS? ASK AWAY!

Give yourselves a giant pat on the back for being fierce, dedicated advocates for your children!

Knowledge is power, so **ALWAYS** reach out to professionals if you have questions.

# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Cooper J.O, Heron T.E, Heward W.L. Applied behavior analysis (2nd ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson; 2007.
- <https://wow.boomlearning.com/>
  - Interactive lessons, language building activities (lots of teachers/therapists use this)
- [www.teacherspayteachers.com](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com)
  - You can sign up for free, and there are tons of great printables for token boards, visual schedules, activities, and much more!