

# Setting your Student Up For Success!

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COVID has thrown us all so many curve balls this year...not least of all, the advent of distance based learning! I hope this guide has some helpful tools to support you and your student at home as we walk this uncharted territory together this school year.

**#1. Cut yourself, and your student, some well-deserved slack:** Do you remember those times long ago when we used to go out, unmasked, and hang out within 3 ft of each other at the grocery store, dog park or even(gasp!) at large concerts?! Though it can feel like a century, in hindsight...it really wasn't that long ago! Only about 8 months! In 8 months, our world has flip-flopped all kinds of topsy-turvy, and we are all in this together, trying to fumble through as best we can and find our footing.

Please REMEMBER this!

Remember...when you sign on 5 minutes late to an important work conference call with messy dishes in the background to give yourself *compassion*. Remember...when your student is having some regressive behavior or acting out more than usual, to give that extra measure of *patience*. Remember...when you are at your absolute wits' end with your coworker or your spouse/aunt/brother/I could go on and on... to assume the best of intentions and give *grace*.

We ALL are near the end of our rope, so our best advice is...give more rope. To ourselves and those all around us. Things will slip, and that is OK. *Give the extra rope* (or it can break!)

**2. Try to Establish and Keep a Schedule (again, as best you can!):** Kids thrive on structure, predictability and knowing what to expect next. We can't control every aspect of their schedule, but we CAN help give a framework of what to expect. Whether it is a written schedule such as a calendar, or a picture schedule (our personal favorite), or a verbal rundown repeated throughout the day, knowing what comes next and having the same routine is *\*very\** important and reassuring to kids (now more than ever!) and actually, for us adults too.

**3. Schedule Time for Play (inside and outside, if possible):** For adults, I would say the majority of us work so we can play :) Not that we don't love our jobs! Just that work is, well...work! For kids, playing IS working. Playing is where kids use their imaginations, where they process their emotions and feelings unexpressed, exercise their bodies, try out social skills and evaluate the results- play is very, VERY important! With our new school model of online learning, bracketing time specifically for them to play and interact with peers (even on zoom) is even more important! One Note: if you are a parent/grandparent like us, you may find yourself tempted to teach or manage your child's play. EG:" Wow! What a beautiful picture! Why did you choose to make the house blue? etc.,etc." Research suggests that child-directed play is the most therapeutic and supportive for a child's development. Just a fancy way of saying that we follow the kids' lead during play and validate but don't question or teach during that time)

4.) **Try to set aside spaces for "school" and "breaks":** This one can actually be pretty fun ☺ It can be helpful to have clearly delineated areas for work and for relaxation so that a child's role in the designated area is very clear. If your child signals that they need a break, they can go to the "break spot", have a juice and a snack maybe, and when they are ready, return to the "school" area. One bonus of this, is that if a student gets to help choose where the spot is or maybe even to help decorate them (if they are so artistically inclined!). This can help increase buy-in. Much like the schedule, clear expectations and rituals are helpful and provide safety in a student's mind, though kids aren't often able to articulate that!

5.) **Be mindful of transitions/try to minimize them and if they are needed, try the 5-3-1 method:**

Life with kids can be cray-Let's be honest- and when we finally get a kiddo oriented to task and they are working in an engaged way- we want that momentum to keep going! Kids actually do, too. Whenever we have to make a transition, it can be hard - even for adults! ( Have you ever been talking with a loved one, hung up, then completed a work call only to end the call with "love you!" by accident??) But in all seriousness, "code switching" or abrupt transitions can be hard on all of us and shouldn't be expected to happen without warning if we want it to be positive.

Something that can be helpful is the 5-3-1 method, and it's like a "countdown" of sorts. EG "ok! nice job painting, we are going to get on our zoom call in FIVE minutes!" then another reminder at 3 and then 1 minute etc. This can help get your student shifting gears with a little notice to help things go more smoothly. Note: Your kiddo may benefit from MORE lead time, as well, depending on your son or daughter. If you know your student will "dawdle", it's ok to give them the 5-3-1 countdowns to a time that is not actually the zoom call/transition/time to leave etc. so there's a buffer there if the transition takes a little longer than we'd expect.

6.) **Find the good things, praise them! and be specific:** This tip is two-fold. You want to try to catch your child "being good", whenever possible and give specific, meaningful praise, preferably at sporadic intervals. We want to attend to the behavior we want to increase (example ideas could be: "That's awesome! I see how focused you are, keep up the great work!", "I love how you are showing your work, that's the stuff!" "Good job knowing when to take a break, dads need breaks too sometimes",etc.) and ignore\* behaviors we want to decrease (\* the exception of course being if a kiddo is doing something unsafe, in which case we need to modify the environment to keep the student safe, redirect verbally with what we WANT the child to do " I need to see both feet on the floor please, thank you." vs "Stop kicking at your sister!" etc, and then keep watch for a chance to "catch them being good" to get back on track or assess if a break might be needed)

The reason we want the praise to be specific is because we want the student to know what mom or dad are seeing that we want them to replicate, and, also to help show that the praise has meaning and isn't just a platitude of sorts. This is why "great job!" is nice, but not as

effective as "great job sounding out that word, that looked tough but you got it!" This also why the praise should hopefully be a little sporadic/at unpredictable intervals and spread out so our kids don't start to "tune it out" and the praise still has weight and meaning. You may find you need to praise your child more frequently for smaller things when they are coming out of a grumpy mood or misbehavior and are making corrections back to "normal", and when they are performing at a higher level it can be more infrequent. It will likely feel clunky and sound a little robotic at first, but can be so helpful! Give it a try.

7. **Breathe!** You are doing a great job. You are the most important person in your students' lives. Take good care of you! If you need a break...take one! Model good self-care for your children. Make sure to "fill your own cup". If you could ever use support, never hesitate to reach out to one of us or anyone at Cougar Ridge. We are invested in your child's happiness, success and welfare and that means supporting you, the most important person they have!

8. **Reach out anytime if you could use additional support for your student:** You and your child are why we are here! Please never hesitate to reach out. We support you and are absolutely "here for you", regardless of if we are in the building or online.