

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO
DISTANCE
LEARNING

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Introduction

The disruption of traditional schooling during the coronavirus pandemic has created an unprecedented challenge for families with school-age children. Parents with no teacher training must figure out how to oversee the education of children stuck at home in an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty.

Luckily, parents can turn for help to Shelli Kurth and Nicole Assisi, experienced educators who are also moms coping with home learning firsthand. Kurth and Assisi have created a series of videos for UCTV's STEAM Channel, "Staying Sane: Tips for Parents in Unprecedented Times," offering advice, encouragement and inspiration for families struggling with distance learning. This guide shares highlights of their strategies. To learn more, watch their videos: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/staying-sane/>

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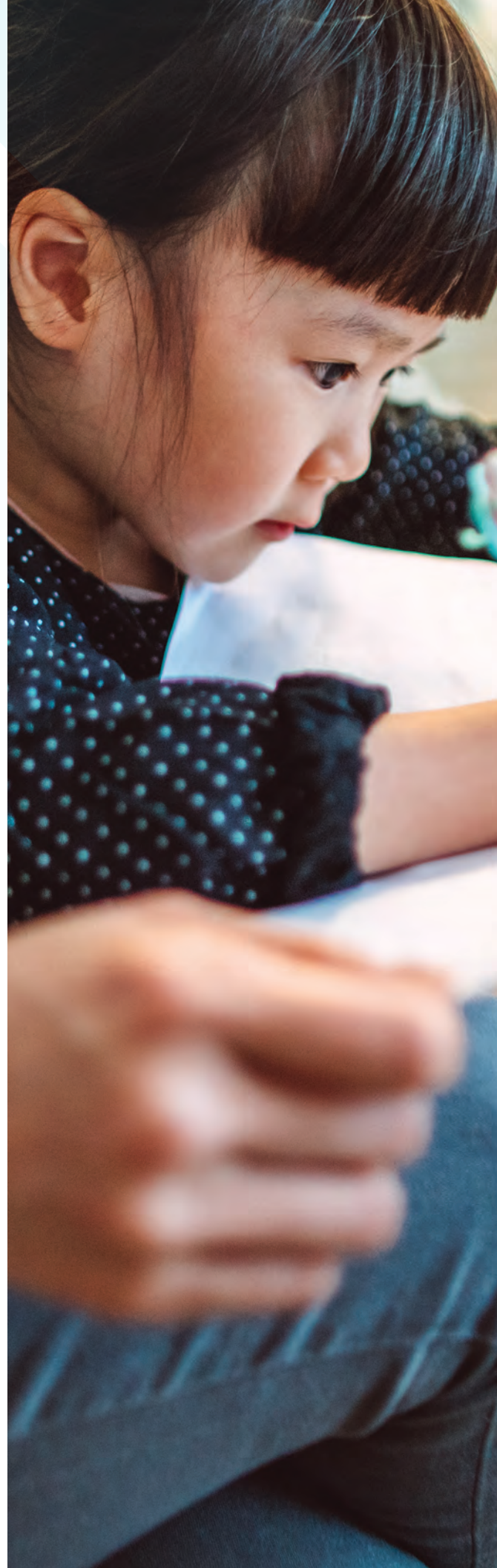
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How to Create a Space for Learning at Home

SET UP A DEDICATED SPACE

Establish a space for your child that is quiet, free from distractions and ready to go every day for learning. This might be a home office or spare bedroom if you have one, or maybe a communal space like the kitchen table. The important thing is that when children are in this space, they have their tools at their fingertips and their mindset is about learning.

CURATE MATERIALS

Make sure the materials your child needs are close by. For younger children, this might include pencils, markers, crayons, a glue stick and a stapler. Preview lessons from your child's school to see what materials will be needed. When a lesson is interrupted because materials are not at hand, that breaks the flow of learning and distracts your child.

CREATE A REALISTIC AND FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE

During distance learning, a day without structure can seem terribly long. With your child's input, create a detailed learning plan for what will happen during the day. Be sure to schedule in breaks and other activities like household chores, art or just "me time." Once you have a schedule, be flexible about it, knowing that disruptions are sure to happen.

ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

Sit down with your child and establish some rules they will be expected to follow during distance learning, such as, "Come ready to learn," "Take breaks as needed" and "Do your best work." Address issues that are likely to arise. Are cell phones allowed in your learning space? Is food allowed? When you have a problem, how will you solve it?

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Add some fun to distance learning by looking for opportunities to celebrate successes. You can celebrate something as simple as a day when your child checks off all items on their learning plan. You could mark the occasion with an impromptu dance party, ice cream sandwiches or a family movie night.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?showID=35841>



How to Structure the Day

Pandemic restrictions mean many parents are spending more time with their children than ever before. That time can be stressful, but it can also be a gift. Building routines and schedules can help parents appreciate this gift.

CREATE A ROUTINE

Create a daily schedule that allows children some input and autonomy. To begin, children benefit from a steady wakeup time and bedtime. Include time for schoolwork and household chores as well as breaks and downtime. For younger children, a visual schedule with pictures and icons works well. If parents are distracted, children can still figure out something to do. And remember to be flexible; you can't follow the exact same schedule each day.

MANAGE SCHOOL TIME

Don't try to recreate a 7-hour school day. The amount of distance learning time per day recommended by experts ranges from 90 minutes for young elementary students to 4½ hours for high schoolers.

PUT SOME FUN IN YOUR ROUTINE

Break up your routine with fun activities. Even young children can help brainstorm things for the family to do together. Some families keep a jar with activities on slips of paper. Now is a good time to take on something new, such as an art project, a hobby, learning a language or mastering a new cooking skill.

INCLUDE TIME FOR EXERCISE

Physical activity is good for the body and the brain. If you can, take a walk around the block or go for a bike ride. Even indoors, you can play balloon volleyball or compete in a family challenge – who can do the most pushups or sit-ups in a minute?

BUILD READING TIME INTO YOUR SCHEDULE

Reading skill is the No. 1 indicator for students getting into college and succeeding there. Make sure children have access to reading material. Check out Libby, an app that lets you borrow and read eBooks free.

MAKE TIME TO COMMUNICATE AND CONNECT

Agree to turn off the screens at some point during the day, perhaps at dinnertime. The news is filled with things that cause anxiety. Take time to connect and communicate away from the day's bad news.

LET CHILDREN GET BORED SOMETIMES

Have some downtime in your routine. Boredom can allow creativity and ingenuity to bloom.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?showID=35854>



Helping Kids Understand Social Distancing

Maintaining social distance is likely to be part of our lives for a long time to come. It's hard enough for adults to sort out all the information about disease transmission. For children, the situation is even more confusing. It's important to communicate with your kids about why social distancing is important.

KEEP THINGS SIMPLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Help young children understand the situation by explaining in simple terms how the virus is transferred. Explain that viruses are germs that are so tiny we can't see them, and they can make us sick if we breathe them in or sometimes if we touch things.



EXPLAIN WHY WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

When talking to young children, explain the need for social distancing in a way that relates to their experience. You might note that when an ambulance goes by, we all pull over as fast as we can because as a community, we're trying to protect the person in the ambulance. In the same way, when we keep social distance, we're working together to keep ourselves and those around us safe.

HOW FAR IS 6 FEET?

Get creative in helping young children recognize and remember what 6 feet of distance looks like. One way is to measure out 6 feet of string or ribbon. Put it on the floor and stand 6 feet apart. Then remove the ribbon and ask the child to estimate distances between various things. Have them put toys on the floor 6 feet apart and then use their ribbon to check. You can even turn this into a math exercise. How many teddy bears are in 6 feet?

TALK TO TEENS ABOUT SOCIAL DISTANCE

Preteens and teens have a better grasp of what 6 feet looks like, but they may really want to rebel against distancing rules. Talk to them calmly about why we are distancing. Teens get lots of information, and some of it is not accurate. Share information from trustworthy sources like the CDC website and California COVID-19 website. Keep the conversation flowing and share your own struggles with social distancing. If your teen messes up, withhold judgment and reiterate that we're all in this together trying to do the right thing.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Helping-Kids-Understand-Social-Distancing-Practices-36094>

Reading with Your Kids

Reading with your children can be a rewarding part of your home learning routine. Reading increases vocabulary and primes all sorts of academic skills. Even for children who can read independently, reading together allows them to really listen and create pictures in their minds. Here are some strategies to make reading to your children more fun, sustainable and educational:

BEFORE READING

- **Get comfortable:** If you're reading to multiple children, situate yourself so they all can see the pictures. Even if there are no pictures, let them see the pages so they can make the connection between the words on the page and what you are saying.
- **Introduce the book:** Show the cover and ask children what they think the story is about. Show the author and illustrator and show where the title is.
- **Make connections** to similar books you have read, or perhaps books by the same author. Discuss what children know about the topic and the setting.
- **Set a purpose for reading the story:** "Listen carefully to see if you can figure out ..."

WHILE READING

- **Vocabulary:** Pause to clarify vocabulary. Let your child guess what an unfamiliar word means.
- **Predictions:** Pause to allow children to make predictions. Ask, "What do you think is going to happen next?"
- **Meaning:** Look for deeper meaning. At a pivotal point in the story, ask, "Why do you think the character is doing that? What must be going through their mind?"
- **Art:** Pause and connect the illustrations to the words, especially for younger children. What more can they learn about the story by looking at the pictures?
- **Recap:** Pause to have your child recap what they have understood so far. This gives you a chance to fill in any gaps in their understanding of the story.

AFTER READING

- **Talk about book:** Ask your child to describe their favorite part of the story and tell why. Talk about your favorite part.
- **Review story components:** Talk about the setting, the main character's problem and how the problem was solved. This gives you a chance to recap the story together.
- **Ask questions** about why events happened and why characters behaved the way they did. Diving into ethical dilemmas helps children make connections to their own lives.
- **Have your child read the story back to you:** They might retell the story by looking at the pictures, or they might use the pictures to make up an entirely different story.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?-showID=36093>



A photograph on the left side of the page shows a woman with dark hair reading a book to a young child with blonde hair. The child is looking at the book with interest. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

What Do I Do with My Teen?

Pandemic restrictions have hit teenagers particularly hard. Prom, graduation and college admissions have all been disrupted. On top of that, teens can't interact with their friends the way they're used to. Here are some strategies parents can use to help teens cope with the disruptions.

COMMUNICATION

Teenagers are not always in the mood to communicate, but it's important to talk honestly with them about the current situation. Share scientific information from reliable sources and talk about the news. Help teens understand why they are losing activities and opportunities. When you tell your teen to follow social distancing, you have to mean it and be consistent. If they push back, actively listen and acknowledge their frustration, but be firm.

TALK ABOUT SCHEDULES AND USE OF TIME

Talk to your teen about what their calendar looks like. Teens should focus on schoolwork for part of the day, but they also need time for physical activity, time for connecting with family and friends, and downtime when they're doing nothing. Teens also need 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night.

TECHNOLOGY

Almost everything we are doing now, from working to connecting with friends, happens on the computer. It's the same for teens. If you have strong rules about technology use, this may be a time to lighten up. Keeping in touch with friends is really important for teens.

ENCOURAGE HELPING OTHERS

Have your teen help with meals, laundry, yardwork and house projects. Encourage them to use their expertise to help you or their grandparents with technological challenges.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION

Teenagers may give off a vibe of "just leave me alone." They need time on their own, but they also need connected time. Not every conversation is going to be positive, but having that conversation in spite of the discomfort is positive. Remember that being in close quarters with your teen has benefits. You get a good sense of what they are working on for school. Research clearly shows that parent engagement is a huge indicator of student success.

CELEBRATE THE POSITIVE

The brain gives negative comments seven times more value than positive comments, so ideally you should have seven positive interactions for every negative interaction. These are tough times, but try to find some joyful moments to share with your teen.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?show-ID=35941>

Communication Strategies and Problem Solving

What parents are being asked to do during the coronavirus crisis is nearly impossible. But the situation also presents an opportunity to create new ways of communicating as a household.

BE PROACTIVE

Here are some ways to lay a foundation for calm and peace in your house.

- **Practice self-care:** Make sure you take care of yourself and make sure your child is sleeping enough, eating well and exercising.
- **Make time to connect:** Play Legos with younger children or horse around with teens for a few minutes every day.
- **Call out the good stuff:** Give attention to your child for doing things you like – being a good listener or sharing. That way you encourage them to repeat the behavior.
- **Provide structure:** Children do better when they know what's expected. As a family, agree on routines and expectations. Discuss these expectations with children regularly.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

All behavior is communication, and all communication exists to meet a need. When your child behaves in an unexpected way, don't take it personally. Instead, understand that your child is trying to communicate to meet a need. You can model more appropriate behavior so your child can see a better way to get their need met.

RECOGNIZE EMOTIONS

Defuse an escalating situation by naming your child's emotion and validating it: "I can see it makes you pretty sad that you can't go play with your friends." Having a name for the emotion helps a child to self-regulate. They understand that the emotion is part of the normal array of feelings people have. The child then has a place to move forward from.

SAY IT AND MEAN IT AND FOLLOW THROUGH

Establish appropriate consequences for breaking the rules and then don't give in. Standing by what you say increases the chances that your *no* will mean *no* and people will listen to you the first time you say something.

WHEN YOU BREAK IT, FIX IT

It's inevitable that you will make mistakes in your interactions with your children. But mistakes offer opportunities to model how to fix things that didn't go the way you hoped. If you speak sharply to your child because you are stressed, you might remedy the situation by saying you are sorry and asking how you can fix things. A hug might do the trick.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?showID=35912>.



Dealing with Emotions While Distance Learning

Stress causes our bodies to go automatically into flight, fight or freeze mode. When you're at your wit's end because of the frustrations of home learning, here are some simple techniques you can use to calm your emotions.

DEEP BREATHING

Breathing is the way we sustain life, but it is also a simple way to reset yourself and find a sense of calm. Deep breathing, or diaphragm breathing, slows down your heartbeat and stabilizes your mood by activating your parasympathetic nervous system. You can use this technique any time, anywhere to get quick relief from stress right when you need it.

- Put your hand on your abdomen.
- Inhale a little deeper and longer than usual. Feel your hand rise and your whole belly fill with air.
- Exhale and feel your whole belly relax. Feel your hand and belly go back to normal.
- Do this as many times as you need.

DEEP BREATHING FOR KIDS

Kids can try a version called teddy bear breathing. The child lies down and puts a teddy bear on their belly. As they inhale deeply, they watch the teddy bear rise. As they exhale, they watch the teddy bear fall.

BUILD A GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Taking time to experience gratitude can calm you and raise your spirits. Place your hand over your heart and give yourself a little pat of gratitude. Sometimes it may feel like there is not a lot to be grateful for. Push yourself to find something. You might think about negatives – "I am grateful that I am not sick." Then switch it around to something positive – "I am grateful to be spending quality time with my children."

HEART-FOCUSED BREATHING

This technique combines gratitude practice with deep breathing.

- Focus on the area around your heart. Imagine your breath flowing into and out of the area around your heart.
- Inhale for a count of five.
- As you are breathing in, think about someone or something you're grateful for.
- Exhale for a count of five.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?showID=35864>



Coping Skills for Kids

Coping skills are habits or activities that people use to manage emotions in a healthy way. Children need a little extra help in developing these skills. Being at home together offers a great opportunity to teach children some new coping tools.

SUPPORT KIDS WITH COPING STRATEGIES

- Prompt your child with what you think is happening for them. Say, "It looks like you're getting frustrated. What do you need right now?"
- Model coping skills for your child when you're feeling stressed: "I'm really frustrated right now. I think I need to take a deep breath. Now I feel better."
- Normalize emotions to help children become comfortable with what they are feeling.
- Acknowledge when your child is using a skill successfully and reinforce good habits: "I noticed you were getting really upset, and you used that stuffed animal to calm down."
- Remind your child of what worked in the past: "Hey, last time you did some coloring and that seemed to help. Should we try that again?"

KID-SPECIFIC TOOLS FOR STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

BOX BREATHING

This technique teaches children to calm themselves by breathing slowly and mindfully.

- Draw a box and have the child trace it slowly with a finger.
- While tracing Side 1, breathe in for a count of four.
- On Side 2, hold the breath for a count of four.
- On Side 3, breathe out for a count of four.
- On Side 4, rest for a count of four.

FOCUS ON THE SENSES

This exercise lets children take themselves out of a stressful situation by focusing on their senses:

- Name five things you can see.
- Name four things you can touch.
- Name three things you can hear.
- Name two things you can smell.
- Name one thing you can taste.

MAKE A CALM-DOWN KIT

With your child's help, put together a box or a bag of items to engage the senses. Possibilities include a stress ball, fragrant lotion, a Slinky or a favorite picture. When the child is stressed, encourage them to spend some time with the kit.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/steam/search-details.aspx?showID=35991>





Your Self-care Toolkit

Many of us are cooped up inside for a lot of the day with new responsibilities and stresses. Intentional movement and mindfulness are tools parents and kids can use to stay calm and keep sane amid stressful circumstances.

INTENTIONAL MOVEMENT

When your body feels better, your mind feels better. Aerobic exercise has been shown to decrease tension, elevate and stabilize mood, improve sleep and boost self-esteem. Exercise also stimulates brain chemicals that help with memory and learning. Try to fit in at least a brief period of movement for you and your children every day.

- If you can get outside, go for a walk, a jog or a bike ride.
- Even in the house, you can do jumping jacks, play balloon volleyball or put on some music and dance.
- Do basic yoga postures, like lying on the floor with your legs up against the wall. This gives your body a break from all the sitting and standing.
- Let younger children try video resources such as Cosmic Kids Yoga and GoNoodle.
- For older kids, sit down and figure out what kind of activity appeals to them. They might take a yoga or martial arts class online, or they might set up a CrossFit area in the backyard.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. – John Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is the opposite of the fight, flight or freeze response, and cultivating it can help you maintain calm and focus in stressful times. Here are some ways you and your children can practice mindfulness.

- Do a full body scan from head to toe and relax the different parts of your body. Pay attention to everything you are feeling. If your attention wanders, notice what's happening and gently direct it back.
- Go for a walk with your child and pick one of the senses. For 2-3 minutes, take notice of that one sense. If you choose hearing, you might notice what the wind sounds like in the leaves and what songs birds are singing.
- Before you eat a sweet treat, notice what it smells like, what it looks like and what the texture is before you put it in your mouth.
- When you're talking to someone, focus on the present and notice every single word. Just listen. This also helps the other person feel like they're really being heard.

Watch the video to learn more: <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Your-Self-Care-Toolkit-Simple-Exercise-and-Mindfulness-Ideas-for-Parents-35911>

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