

The importance of routine

“LOSING THE ROUTINES YOU’VE COME TO RELY ON CAN BE A BIG SOURCE OF STRESS.”

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“One of the most important things to do in the midst of the pandemic is to create structure in the day,” says Terrill Bravender, MD, MPH, Chief of Adolescent Medicine at Michigan Medicine C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital. “If kids have online school responsibilities, they should get up in the morning and be connected to school during those hours.”

Create boundaries by establishing “school day hours.” Maybe it starts at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., but it should be consistent to keep some sense of normalcy and predictability. Break times should be built into school day schedule, where kids can check in with friends or engage in other relaxing/rewarding activities. Remember, students are used to having lunch period, short breaks between classes and other opportunities for socializing and resting their brain during a typical school day.

And after the school day is done, then it’s done for the whole day and students can enjoy their free time.



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Helping families manage their day during Covid-19

“These are unprecedented times.” Are you tired of hearing that phrase? Repeated ad nauseum by reporters, politicians and everyone in between when referring to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the words may be true but do little in the way of assisting students to learn and succeed during such times. While not attending school in a brick and mortar building, and adhering Michigan’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” mandate, students and their families have been asked to bypass the customary traditional education process and suddenly manage large amounts of unstructured time in their day while continuing on their learning journey. In an effort to support families during these “unprecedented times,” this resource details suggestions for helping your student manage their daily routine, schoolwork and expectations.

YOUR CHILD’S DAILY SCHEDULE

Create a schedule that works for your family. Many parents are working from home, sharing devices and possibly experiencing high levels of stress. Your schedule does not need to match another family’s schedule, and that is okay! Distance learning is new for all of us and your child may be receiving weekly assignments across 6-7 subject areas.

The important part of having a schedule is the consistency it provides for your child. Here are some suggestions to help you create the best schedule for your child:

- Consider starting the day with a morning check-in meeting to review a checklist of the day’s activities and to gauge their mood. Check in several times throughout the day.
- Create 30-45 minutes blocks of learning time for students to work on their lessons.
- Build frequent brain breaks into their schedule to allow the brain time to rest and process the information learned.
- Include time to get outside and be active during the day, which does wonders to improve mood, attention span and sleep.
- Encourage passions and unstructured play – these are also learning opportunities.
- Research shows that younger students perform best on analytical tasks earlier in the day, so you may want to schedule activities like math in the morning.
- Set regular bedtimes and wakeups during the school week.

Encouraging healthy habits

Children will do better during this stressful time if they get adequate sleep, eat healthy meals and exercise regularly. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, with set times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood and the ability to fulfill academic expectations.

Daily Wellness Checklist

- Did I get 9-11 hours of sleep last night?
- Did I eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables?
- Did I get outside for at least 60 minutes of fresh air and activity?
- Did I drink enough water? (50% of your body weight in ounces)
- Did I challenge myself to get outside of my comfort zone?
- Did I do something fun and relaxing?
- Was I social? Did I reach out to a friend, cousin, grandparent, etc. by phone, text, email, FaceTime or write a letter?

Try to ensure that a good portion of leisure time activity is active, both mentally and physically. "Passive observation and watching of content is fine within limits, but don't let your child's mind go numb by consuming excessive amounts of content that does not require thought."

Checking in with your child

No matter where learning takes place – in the classroom, at home, virtually or on-the-go, it's important to check in physically and emotionally to ensure children are feeling energized, supported and ready for what's ahead.

While children may not be moving from one classroom to the next or to and from lunch and recess, a virtual or at-home learning environment can still have many of the supports that a typical classroom or school has.

Check in with how children are feeling physically throughout the day and pay attention to sedentary patterns. Make sure they are fueling their bodies with good foods and are balancing their day with physical activity and play.

- **Break up the day with active brain breaks to recharge the body and brain.** Get the wiggles out together with an online video or throw on some music and just allow your bodies to move. You can also integrate movement into lessons for active learning opportunities – squats for math, spelling with yoga, etc.
- **Schedule "recess" in your day-to-day routine.** Take a nature walk for fresh air or kick around a soccer ball and develop new skills. Use this time to break up the day and create a space for more unstructured play. Start a pots and pans band, build a fort with sheets or use a pillow cushion raft to head off on a new adventure.
- **Make sure children are staying on a routine and carve out time for meals and snacks.** Use this time to discuss the mind-body connection and get children thinking about the power of food and how it fuels our bodies for the activities we love most.

Children experience many of the same feelings and emotions that adults do but may not fully understand why or how to communicate about them. Knowing how to recognize, process and react to different feelings is all a part of social emotional learning – a process that continues throughout our lifetime. **Integrate opportunities for emotional check-ins and supports for emotional regulation and self-management.**

- **Discover ways to make the most of screen time – whether it be for learning, connection, mindfulness, movement or simply for play.** Pairing online learning with hands-on activities is a great way to create space for children to develop skills in self-awareness and self-management while learning something new.

- While physical activity breaks play a huge role in creating healthier learning environments, it doesn't always have to be so literal. **Activity generated during unstructured play time—or play time during lessons—is equally beneficial to students, especially for creativity, focus, and behavior.**

- Invite children to engage in conversations around their feelings – with you, their peers or with themselves. **Create an environment where children feel encouraged to share as much or as little as they are ready.** Integrate these conversations into activities they



Taking time to talk

Let your child's questions about the pandemic guide you. Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your children's well-being. Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones.

"Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle."

Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear.

enjoy the most – when they feel the most at ease or empowered. Dedicating space to openly talk through feelings, ask questions and problem solve supports children in developing self-management skills and builds resiliency.



Embracing Technology to Stay Connected

Technology rules shouldn't completely go out the window – parents should still be mindful of what platforms their children are using and to make sure they are being safe.

But, it's OK to somewhat relax on the rules since kids will now rely on technology daily and for longer periods for school. With Michigan's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" mandate, in-person contact with friends is limited, but parents can help kids stay connected with their friends and extended family using technology. Encourage appropriate and reasonable use of phones, tablets and computers for staying connected. "Social contact is very important for children," says Dr. Gallagher. "Youth that are connected to other children are happier, less anxious and have more fun."

Meditation and Mindfulness Websites & Apps



[headspace.com/mi](https://www.headspace.com/mi) - Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the **Stay Home, Stay Mindful** website in partnership with Headspace, a global leader in mindfulness and meditation, and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to provide a new, free mental health resource for Michiganders. **Headspace: Meditation & Sleep** is also available as an app.



<https://www.aloyoga.com/pages/alo-gives> - Alo Yoga's nonprofit Alo Gives is dedicated to bringing movement and mindfulness to kids of all ages.



Stop, Breathe & Think Kids: Focus, Calm & Sleep – This app is geared toward kids age 5 through 10, and features 15 short video meditation "missions," each of which last between two and eight minutes.



Smiling Mind - Smiling Mind is an Australian nonprofit offering mindfulness and meditation programs for all ages. To achieve their purpose — equipping young people with the integral skills they need to thrive in life — the organization offers free comprehensive programs geared specifically toward different populations, including adults, youth, family, classroom and workplace individuals and groups

In addition, YouTube has many channels of nature sounds/meditation music that can be utilized for studying, relaxation or to assist with sleep. Examples: Nature Soundscapes, Relaxing Sounds of Nature, Nature Healing Society and more.

Focus on the positive

Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow children to connect with their friends virtually.

Identify projects that might help others. This could include: writing letters to the neighbors or others who might be stuck at home alone or to healthcare workers; sending positive messages over social media; or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform for younger children to hear.



Remember – you are an educator

You have taught your children a lot of what they know. From riding a bike, learning to swim, shooting a basketball, to tying their shoes. Take a moment to eliminate the worry of keeping up and focus on the life lesson you are currently teaching them.

You are teaching your child how to respond when unexpected things are thrown into life, and how to respond to adversity when you have no control over a situation. Are you positive? Resilient? Or stressed and angry? Your children are watching and learning from you right now. How you respond during such a difficult time is how they will respond when difficulty comes into their life as an adult.

Stay positive - you and we will get through this!

Sources

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Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting From COVID-19

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National Association of School Psychologists



Parent Tips for Motivating Children and Teaching From Home

<https://bit.ly/MotivationTipsHandout>

Conor Corey, Educator, Parent, and Khan Academy Ambassador

School's Out: A Parent's Guide for Meeting the Challenge During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Staying Healthy and Active with Virtual and At-Home Learning

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Action For Healthy Kids