

When home is the office and the classroom: Strategies for teleworking parents with students in remote learning

Helping businesses and employees put together successful teleworking programs is a big part of what GoTriangle's Transportation Demand Management specialists do. This service has become only more important over the past several months as the social-distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic have made teleworking the only workable option for so many.

Many teleworking parents also have students in online learning at home and have had to turn their households into classrooms, too.

For tips on how to juggle it all, we asked some teachers, parents and other experts for advice.

Our list of tips is not exhaustive. It doesn't address the need for emotional support and stress relief for students and parents or include exercise or meal planning, which was referenced multiple times in feedback we received.

Some school districts are making plans to return to the classroom, but some parents already made the decision to keep their students home for the year.

For those who are having to manage working from home while children also are learning from home, here are some tips our experts offered.

Develop a routine: Parents should set the example.

- Get dressed. You wouldn't wear sweaty gym clothes to the office, and you wouldn't let your student wear pajamas to school. Set expectations that school is just as important from home with cues that separate leisure and home from class and work.
- Discuss your week and day in advance. On Sunday, plan the week with all members of the household. Each morning, review the day. Share what times you have important meetings and have your student review his or her priorities and schedule. This communication establishes responsibilities, confirms understanding and adds accountability.
- Signal the end of the school day. No school bells will ring. Find a way to separate learning, work and the start of family time. Having responsibilities to close out the day can further detach the blur of school and home. Have students close out classroom software, clean the desk space or set up homework prep.

- Signal the end of the workday. You won't walk in from a commute so alert your student when you're officially off the clock. If you work behind a closed office door, walk out. Start music on speaker phone, tell a joke every day or ask "How was school today?" This can establish boundaries for students to know when you're available for non-emergency interruptions.
- Schedule work: Digital access doesn't indicate organization.
- Use a written or printed schedule. Have students write out their schedules that they can easily reference. Bonus: This helps with muscle memory. Combine it to create a master schedule that includes all family members. Place this in a location or multiple areas for easy reference.
- Have both a schedule *and* an agenda. It's like your Outlook calendar. Your office calendar blocks off time and a meeting name, but each meeting has an agenda. Each class subject or activity is the equivalent to the meeting name, and the agenda contains the class work duties and homework.
- Estimate how long activities take. Don't just include start times. If teachers don't provide information on duration, or if it is a session without a virtual moderator, help your students estimate how long activities take so they don't procrastinate starting or get frustrated when they thought they were going to be finished with work. Consider a timer or pre-set alarms on an old cell phone to cue transition to the next activity.

Delineate work spaces: The couch and bed aren't suitable for your boss or their teacher.

- Location, location, location. You have your desk or maybe even an office to yourself. Create a workspace for your student. Less is more, so try to eliminate distractions such as noise, siblings, tempting games, trinkets or pets. Create boundaries between multiple students, too.
- Ergonomics. Environment and comfort are important for performance. The incorrect height for chairs and desktops can hinder success. University of California, Berkeley, has [ergonomics best practices](#) for all ages, various rooms and changing scenarios.
- Right place, right time. Different activities need different tools. Use the schedule to maximize space and accommodate everyone. Students practicing a musical instrument should schedule that in a more secluded room away from conference calls, but perhaps another student uses the time for art at the kitchen table so the trumpet doesn't coincide with math instructions.
- Keep work organized. Check the status or work with daily reports from your student and choose a frequency for checking work submissions via online tracking from the school. Separate finished from incomplete work. Depending on the student's age and level of responsibility, this can vary from folders that are color coded by subject with pockets where pieces move from the "Incomplete" to the "Complete" pocket to older students using a tracking spreadsheet, digital folders or file naming.

There are many online sources for more [tips and tricks for distance learning](#). Find out what works for you and your family. You may even learn ways to make your workday more productive, too. Check out www.GoTriangle.org/Telework for more information and updates.

For a printable PDF of these tips, please click [here](#).