Dear DSACT Parents, Guardians, and Family Members:

Just a few weeks ago, our world seemed a different place. We were anticipating spring break. We were preparing our families for what was to happen, never expecting what did happen. Now we’re navigating new land. Such unanticipated change may increase anxiety in children (and adults)!

So, how do we move forward? I’ve curated a list of suggestions to restore some balance to life and will add to this list and communicate with you during this challenging time. You can expect DSACT to be here for you as we navigate this period.

**Our first orders of business are to establish a routine, manage anxiety, and address behavior concerns.** Find our tips below.

1. **Establish a daily routine now:** Our kids are visual learners, so use a visual schedule to reinforce the routine and promote predictability. This doesn’t have to be elaborate, but make it fun! Use photos of your kid(s) to use on the schedule.

   Most important is to follow the schedule! **By promoting predictability, we decrease anxiety.**

What to include on the schedule will vary for each family, but some basics are:

- Get up and go to **bed at a regular time**
- **Get dressed** every day
- **Eat meals/snacks at a regular time**
- **Plan outdoor exercise** - fresh air and sunshine improve moods! Prepare in advance for poor weather - Do yoga with [Cosmic Yoga](https://www.cosmicyoga.com). YouTube is a great resource:
  - Dance to music with [Debbie Doo](https://www.debbedoo.com/)
  - Explore motion and exercise for kids with [Jack Hartmann](https://www.jackhartmann.com/).
- **Build-in quiet time** and independent play for everyone. Kids can read books, play with toys, listen to music, etc.
- **Chunk academics** into short blocks instead of one long block, and do academics when you and your child are at your best.
• **Plan limited technology time.** Technology (TV, iPad/Phone, computer, etc) should not be available all day. Students practice waiting, communication, compromise, and sharing at school, and this should not change at home.

• **Plan family time.** Do something everyone (or most members) enjoy - play games, look at old pictures, watch a movie, call grandparents and friends, talk about things you want to do someday, etc. Plan a time to be thankful for what good has been in your life today...the sun was out, the trees and flowers are beautiful, we are healthy, your wonderful smile, food to eat, etc. Each family member needs to share.

• Plan ways to **connect with others** and do things for others. Bring in trash cans for an elderly neighbor, make cards to give to others, pull weeds for a neighbor.

• Are there new or more frequent chores with everyone at home? Hold kids accountable for their **chores**, new and old.

2. **Manage family anxiety.**

• First we need to **identify signs of anxiety** in our kids. Anxious kids may appear angry, clingy, cranky. They may twirl or pull their hair, bite their nails, or begin sleeping poorly. Look for new or changing behavior and hygiene practices.

• **Be supportive.** Acknowledge how your kids are feeling and let them know it is okay to feel that way. This may be difficult as many of us as adults are feeling anxious. **If you feel unable to support your child, please contact DSACT for further guidance.**

• **Be honest when you don’t have all the answers.** We don’t know when we’ll go back to school, for example. Remember that children pick up on both verbal and nonverbal communication. Mixed messages in what you say and how you act can be unsettling.

• Take action to **release your tension** and theirs. See our ideas in #1 Establishing a routine above! Childmind.org has wonderful tips to help parents ease their own stress and anxiety - and ideas for kids, too!

• Talk to your child about **current events.** For ideas, read Talking to Your Child About the Virus. Be sure to follow the additional links in the article for more tips.

• Avoid sharing more information than your child can understand. A social story is available here. What is the Coronavirus?

• **Give your children some control** over their lives. Simple things like washing their hands are powerful. Wash your lyrics! Offer choices at mealtime, choices of books, break activities, games to play.

3. **Address behavior concerns.**

Expect everyone’s behavior to change as your new routine is established and especially if you are now Mom/Dad AND teacher.

There are several strategies to keep in mind.

• **Write down** new rules and routines (see #1 Establish a routine above).
- **Be consistent** with reinforcing new rules and routines.
- **Allow wait time** when you give directions (at least 10 seconds). Repeat once, then provide physical cues if necessary.
- **Offer choices.** You can use pictures to show choices. Give only the choices you are willing to do. For example, do you want to do math or read?
- Practice ‘**First/Then.**’ First you must..., then... Always do the lesser preferred activity before the preferred activity.
- Have your child **work toward a reward.**
- **Offer breaks,** and set a time limit on breaks. If a break includes an electronic device, set an automatic timer on the device.
- **Use a timer** to end activities. Children are less likely to argue with a device.
- **Provide a visual schedule** of what you will be doing today. [Visual schedule templates and explanations](#) are widely available.
- **Give a warning** (at 10 and 2 minutes) to help transition between activities, especially from a preferred to a non-preferred activity.
- **Offer praise** when your child does a great job. Aim for 10 positives for every one negative. Be specific about what was great.

You have this! Take a deep breath. Nothing will be perfect. We learn as we go. It is good to model this for your children. They will learn that we all make mistakes. We try to do better. We ask others what was good and bad. Always find the positive in every situation. And most importantly, laugh! Genuine laughter makes everything better.

Stay tuned for setting up your home for teaching, tips for teaching, and educational resources. Teaching will be easier if you have tackled establishing a routine and managing anxiety.

For more information on using visuals schedules, visual supports, and behavior ideas, browse to DSACT’s [Educational Resources](#).

Please email me at [Peggy.wolf@dsact.org](mailto:Peggy.wolf@dsact.org) if you have specific questions or concerns. We will do this together!