

Tips for Parents on Developing Homeschool Routines
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How do you create your “new normal” during this time of uncertainty? It’s a challenge. But it’s even a greater challenge for your child when most of their familiar routines are suddenly stopped. The messages we are getting indicate the length of time for this is undetermined. So one way to attempt to address this involves using some simple visual tools to add some degree of structure to the day for your child. Putting a few of these in place can help your child adjust to your new routine more quickly and with less anxiety. These visual tools may even help your family harmony after the Coronavirus is gone.

Visual Tool: Visual Schedules

Many of us understand the value of using a schedule to structure blocks of time for students. Right now, it’s really important. People often say, “He knows the schedule.” But that doesn’t quite work right now. When students lose their expected routines, they need help adjusting. Many of our children need information to manage the changes taking place in their lives right now. They don’t necessarily process the conversation and information that “floats” out there for everyone else. They need to be able to see it in an organized, concrete way, such as in a schedule.

We can start with creating and posting a predictable schedule to guide the day. A home schedule won’t look like a school day schedule and that’s just fine. A home schedule will highlight major activities or changes in the day. For example:

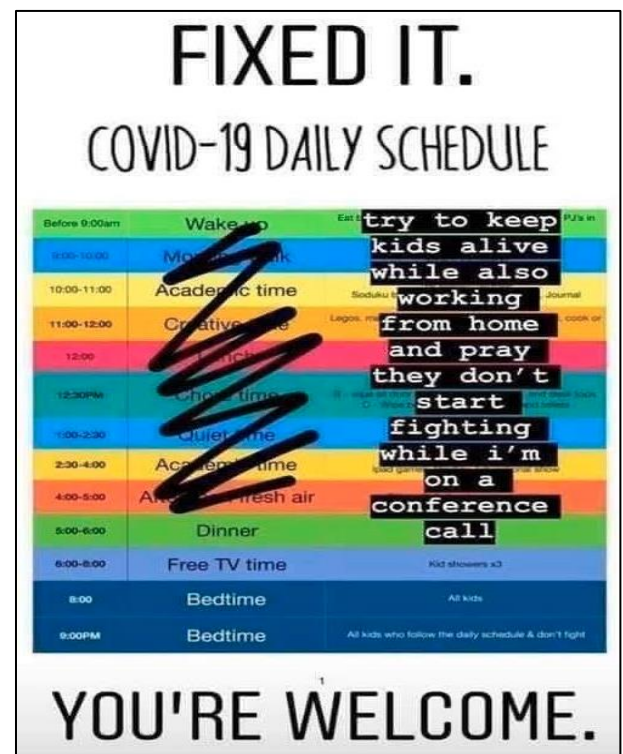
- Homework Time (in a specific location for academic tasks)
- Meal Times
- Technology Time
- Snack Time
- Play Time
- Book Time
- Exercise
- Game Time
- Jobs
- TV Time

One way a home schedule can be different from school is that there may be some activities that must happen at specific times, while others may only last a specific amount of time. For example, Tech Time can only be 30 minutes. This can be part of the schedule. Also, be open to being flexible with adjusting times and inserting short “brain breaks” or movement breaks to match your child’s needs.

Embed Choices within the Day’s Schedule

Consider creating some opportunities for your child to have some choices within the day’s schedule. You and your child may work together to determine the order of the other activities on the list. It might be dictated by you or perhaps it can be negotiated with your child. There can be a million variations of this. The home schedule doesn’t need to be rigidly timed like the school schedule is. You can adjust the timing in a way that fits your family. The point is that there is some structure to the day and some time limits for specific activities. The bonus is that when your child needs a change for any reason, you can lead him back to the schedule to move on to the next activity.

A visual “choice board” can be used very creatively to help the student feel like he/she has some control over life. For example: The schedule says you need to do a job during “Job Time”. But



creating a choice board for jobs will give the child an opportunity to choose which job gets done. Choice boards are useful to help children know what their options are, for example with snacks--if it is not on the choice board, it's not available right now.

Include “Brain Breaks” and Movement Breaks

During this time many children are home receiving instruction through online learning. This is a great use of technology, but it leaves children sitting in front of a screen for hours a day which is a lot for most kids. When children are expected to sit and attend for long periods of time, they naturally start “fidgeting” in order to get the movement their body desperately needs and is not getting enough of to “turn their brain on” and attend to the task. If we ask them to “sit still and pay attention”, then essentially their brain goes “back to sleep” (e.g., is not operating at an optimal level of focus or attention).

For children to attend for periods of time and learn, we need to let them move.

Movement “turn on” the brain (see figure right). We can provide this movement to children through “brain breaks”. Brain Breaks are short, energizing bursts of activity that boost blood flow, send oxygen to the brain, and help kids better retain information. They can be as simple as taking five minutes to stand up, stretch, and run in place.

Having kids take a 3-5 minute break during learning blocks can help their brains be optimized to learn for up to the next 45 minutes. So allowing kids to get up, stretch and clear their minds is not only good for their bodies, but helps them to focus better on their school work. Consider setting a kitchen timer or phone for 45-60 minutes. When it rings, have your child pick a brain break activity to do—you may even want to do the action together. This break is also a good time to encourage children to go to the bathroom or get a drink if needed. Some places to check for “Brain Break” ideas include:

- Exercise with [Go Noodle](https://www.gonoodle.com/for-families/)'s short videos for movement: <https://www.gonoodle.com/for-families/>
- Have child perform stretching and yoga moves from either site:
 - www.yogainmyschool.com
 - <https://www.cosmickids.com/category/watch/>
- Download a roll the dice break game (from www.yourtherapysource.com/rollsomefunfree.html) at:
 - <https://d3eizkexujvlb4.cloudfront.net/2019/01/22062339/Roll-Some-Brain-Breaks-Freebie-updated.pdf>
- Families can de-stress together with meditation apps for kids and families found at:
 - <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/assistive-technology/finding-an-assistive-technology/8-meditation-apps-for-kids>
 - <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/lists/meditation-apps-for-kids>
- Download free K-2 energizers at: http://www.pelinks4u.org/files/energizersK_2.pdf
- View “move to learn” videos at: <https://movetolearnms.org/>
- Check out a list of fun brain break dance videos with links at: <http://teachtrainlove.com/20-brain-break-clips-dance-like-no-ones-watching/>

Visual Tool: Calendars

How long will this change in my routine exist? Really, we don't know. But a calendar is important to orient your child to what is happening. Use a calendar to cross off days as they go by. You can even pick days on the calendar where you can review what's happening with your child. For example, every Friday have a “meeting” to talk about what is happening next.

For additional resources, please check our website at: <https://www.ncie.org/online>

Cognitive Effects of Exercise in Preadolescent Children

Average composite of 20 students' brains taking the same test after sitting quietly or taking 20 minute walk



Source: Derived from research by Dr. C.H. Hillman, University of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign, Urbana, IL (2009).