

# Distance Learning Strategies

## *Helpful strategies for students with Learning Disabilities*

### PROXIMITY

Proximity refers to how near the parent is to the child during distance learning instruction. While this strategy is often used as a behavior management technique, it can also serve as a non-verbal reminder to children who struggle with inattention or hyperactivity, such as those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as the mere presence of a parent nearby has a positive effect on a child's learning. When the parent stands close to a student, this helps this child recall where their attention needs to be — that is, on the task at hand.



Use of this practice at home can be done by creating a shared study environment where your child completes homework or school projects while you focus on your own tasks. As you work alongside one another, you will be able to keep an eye on your child, be nearby to help out when she needs it, and model focus and close attention to your responsibilities.

### CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Creating clear practices can increase student engagement and foster high-quality work. To this end, children need to know what success looks like during distance learning.



Understanding exactly what is being asked of them and how these expectations relate to subjects that they care about is especially important for students with disabilities; such instructional practices satisfy their need for consistency in routine and familiarity.

Children with disabilities may struggle to comprehend what the task is if expectations are unclear or muddled. They may lack the ability to search for context clues or to infer meaning. Activities with multiple steps may also be too complex for them to process. Clarity and brevity are key to success for these children.

Maintaining clear, consistent expectations is not only important at school, but just as necessary at home since children with special needs thrive on predictable environments. Just as educators who work with these students seek to distinguish and meet individual needs, parents too can support each child according to their abilities and interests and provide a clear path to success.

Post your household rules, chore lists, and schedule for distance learning in a location that is easy for everyone to see and be sure to review them with your kids if you need to make any changes. Most importantly, demonstrate your expectations for your children at home by using an “I do, we do, you do” model. That is, show them how to complete a task, practice with them, and then let them carry it out independently.

Recognize that it may be challenging at first for a child with a disability to understand why expectations differ for each sibling, but this abstract concept can be reinforced through explanation and discussion. Help your child identify similarities and differences between herself and her siblings and explain why it’s important that you tailor your expectations to these individual differences. Allow them to identify an expectation for themselves as well in order to promote ownership of her behaviors and responsibilities.

And be sure to provide specific recognition to each child when they meet the goals you’ve established.

## LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Providing small opportunities for your child to demonstrate leadership will give your child a sense of responsibility and pride. At home, you can create chances for your child to use their abilities for leadership. For instance, let them teach you the latest technique they learned in math or guide you through something they learned on a computer program. You can ask them to be responsible for writing down the grocery list each week or calling everyone together for dinner nightly. Seemingly small tasks still allow children to lead and feel proud of their accomplishments.

## CHOICE

For many children with disruptive behavior may emerge unintentionally. These children are often not able to express their needs or wants appropriately when they feel overwhelmed. Giving children a number of choices can help them manage an environment that may feel uncontrollable. This practice also enables them to develop skills

to solve their own problems within defined limits, in turn strengthening their self-esteem, independence, and motivation. It’s important for parents to understand that children need opportunities to take risks and make decisions within controlled and enforced boundaries. The difference is that some children may not be provided with sufficient experiences to develop these skills like their peers. Offering your child choices at home and respecting the decisions they make will enable them to experience the consequences of such risk-taking, both positive and negative, in a supportive, safe environment. This, in turn, provides an opportunity to discuss the factors that contribute to successful decision-making and demonstrate that you appreciate their efforts to learn and grow. And these experiences can help your child gain the confidence to take greater chances in the classroom as well.



## PREFERENTIAL SEATING

Where a student is seated in a classroom can greatly support her individual needs. Some children attend to instruction better when seated nearest to the teacher, while others work better when their place is far from the classroom door and out of direct sight of a classroom window. Or, it may be that being too close to the computers or the block area is distracting for a child.



Some children often have difficulty controlling their impulses, in part because it is exhausting to filter out the other distractors in their environment. Providing these children with preferential seating can remove them from many of the attentional challenges they contend with in their learning environment, enabling them to focus on their work or the instruction.

Understanding the effect that distractions may have on your child can help you reassess the spaces where they work at home. A child may benefit from a separate area free from distractors or extra stimuli, one that is comfortable and soothing after an already-exhausting day from not being able to experience their normal routine. For many children, the calming effect that such spaces foster is essential for them to focus effectively on their schoolwork. Indeed, this setting can serve as the area where you work side-by-side with your child.

## RECOGNIZING EFFORT

Teachers often use a variety of rewards to reinforce children's efforts to meet the performance standards set for each of them. Tangible rewards are not always necessary, as symbolic recognition can motivate a student just as successfully. Effective teachers are welcoming and respectful when they acknowledge how a student met expectations; they encourage children to share their ideas and thoughts and build on the individual abilities and learning styles that they use to reach their goals.



In addition, the feedback these educators give when they reinforce a student's effort is highly specific. Simply stating "Great job!" does not provide a child with insight into the exact actions they took that enabled them to succeed. Rather, a teacher will praise the steps a student took by saying, for example, "I really appreciate how you immediately began working quietly at your desk when you came back into the classroom. That is exactly what you were asked to do!"

As a parent, you can implement these strategies by allowing your child to share their schoolwork, express their thoughts and opinions on the work that they did in the classroom and explain how they believe their unique strengths helped them accomplish these tasks. In addition, using descriptive praise will help your child understand the desired actions or behavior they are practicing. For instance, shifting from a simple "thank you," which may not convey what you are thankful for, try "I really appreciate that you put away your laundry without me having to remind you" or "Thank you for beginning your homework at 5 p.m. as we agreed."