

E-Learning Overload: 8 Tips Educators Can Give Frustrated, Anxious Parents

By David Rauf on March 27, 2020 5:36 PM

It's safe to say administrators and teachers aren't the only ones feeling overwhelmed amid school closures and the worsening coronavirus outbreak.

Parents are also bearing the brunt.

With the uptick in schools relying on [remote learning](#) to keep instruction going while brick-and-mortar education is paused, many parents are having to take on a variety of new roles, from playing IT help desk to becoming makeshift teaching assistants.

For some, life at home might be more complicated than ever: parents could be juggling a brand new work-from-home scenario, potentially dealing with the sudden loss of work, or trying to manage sick family members. It all heightens the need for administrators and teachers to provide steady communication for parents during what amounts to a nationwide e-learning experiment.

And this much is clear: parents have a growing list of questions for teachers and administrators about what role to play during extended closures.

"I'm hearing more and more from parents around the country that they're not sure what to do," said Susan Patrick, president and CEO of the Aurora Institute, formerly the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. "They don't have clear guidance."

David Wick, president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, said teachers and administrators should be proactive with messaging by relaying some basic guidance to parents to help them deal with current challenges.

"You don't want to be too simplistic with what you recommend, but learning is a very complicated task and you have to understand who the audience is," he said. "We're asking someone to take on a task of helping to educate a child and they may not have any experience whatsoever."

So we've put together some tips that educators can give parents as the pandemic plays out.

1. Start slow: Parents can identify subjects or areas their children are interested in and explore from there. Patrick, of the Aurora Institute, said parents can easily get involved in their child's day-to-day remote learning by setting goals, looking for curated educational material on a district's website or coming up with reading and writing tasks, including keeping a journal of the current unusual circumstances as a reflective exercise.

"Start by doing something basic," she said. "Take one step at a time."

2. Set a schedule: A remote educational environment will require students of all ages to take much more ownership of their learning. That autonomy can bring challenges, so the need for parents to establish a daily routine at home is key.

"We're still getting up at the same time every day for school, and getting dressed and having breakfast. We're keeping a regimen," said Rebecca Dwenger, a parent of two school-aged children and an instructional technology consultant for Hamilton County Educational Services Center in Ohio. "If my kids had it their way, they'd sleep till noon and then get to work. That's not happening."

Some flexibility should also be built into that schedule: "If a student doesn't want to work on math right now, then let them work on reading, or have them work on something that's less intellectually challenging but more hands on like an art project," said Wick of the NAESP. "Find something that gets other parts of their brain working."

3. Set up a workspace: Parents can help normalize the experience for a student by providing a consistent place at home to work, whether it be for reading or video conferencing a lesson.

"Find a place where the student is going to have materials they need and can work without being interrupted by other things happening in the house," said Bruce Friend, chief operating officer at the Aurora Institute.

4. Stay upbeat and positive: Students are impressionable, and if a parent gets frustrated that's likely to rub off. Parents should maintain an open mind and a lot of patience.

"We're all trying to work through this together," said Francesca Ragonese, a technology instructional coach at Chester School District in New Jersey. "If parents can keep body language calm and collected, the student is going to respond to that as well."

5. Resist the urge to do too much: An important thing for parents to understand: it's OK if your child struggles at some point. It's equally important to let them try to work through an issue on their own. That's part of the learning process. Parents want to be hands-on but also resist the urge to solve every problem a student encounters. There's a fine line between helping too much and not helping enough, said Friend, the COO of the Aurora Institute.

"For the overbearing parent, you have to support your child, but don't insert yourself as the problem solver in every situation," he said.

6. Communicate with teachers: School officials have a message for parents during these times: over communicate, if necessary.

"Teachers are ready and willing to respond to any question parents have," said Ragonese, the technology instructional coach at Chester School District in New Jersey. "They need to make sure they keep any and all questions coming."

7. Plan for 'brain breaks': Too much screen time or staying buried in a book too long without a break for physical exertion can be a bad recipe. Parents should allow for exercise time, or at least some time away from lessons during the day.

"Four hours of sitting for a third grader is too much, so we encourage brain breaks," said Wick of the NAESP. "Parents can go out and exercise and play with their children."

8. Group support: Parents can also reach out to other parents. One of the best ways to do that is through online groups. Wenger, the instructional technology consultant for Hamilton County Educational Services, said an online parent group for her daughter's

high school graduation class has proven to be a valuable way to share tips and learn more about what's going on.

"Parents are using those groups now to talk this out," she said. "If a parent is feeling lost, they should find a group to talk it through with."