

Seven Keys to Learning at Home

Helping your child effectively learn at home can be difficult and stressful under the best of circumstances. With schools across the country and around the world shut down due to the COVID-19 outbreak, current circumstances for at-home learning are far from ideal! Yet despite the difficulties, you *can* help your child learn at home.

The situation we find ourselves in is a real challenge. It's a challenge for your child's regular teacher—there's nothing that teachers would like more than to be back in the classroom with your child—and it's also a challenge for students. Bedrooms and living rooms are not classrooms. Being at home, unexpectedly and for a long period of time, complicates the learning process. And it is a challenge for parents, for a number of reasons. Many parents are trying to work while helping their children learn. Some have more than one child to assist. And nearly all parents learned the material in a different way than their children are learning today.

How can you as a parent help your child learn under these conditions? Dr. Jillian Lederhouse and Brita Beitler of Wheaton College have teamed up with Tyndale to help parents manage the crisis—and the opportunity—of at-home learning. Here are seven keys to learning at home to get you started.

1. Have books, paper, and writing utensils available at home for everyday use.

According to Maryanne Wolf, a researcher from UCLA, children learn best when using physical supplies like actual books and paper and pens or pencils. Digital learning tools can be great for older kids, but for younger children in kindergarten through fifth grade, the real thing is the right thing. Online learning is difficult for young children, so give them hands-on materials whenever possible.

You may wish to consider creating a “learning toolbox” for younger learners. Find an old shoebox or other container, and fill it with safety scissors, markers, glue, paper, crayons, pencils, and other helpful supplies. Keep the toolbox in the same spot to provide some consistency for your student. And if you're using pencils, make sure your child has access to a safe, easy-to-use pencil sharpener.

2. Low-tech tools can assist in learning.

A timer is a great way to help a child stay focused for a set amount of time. If, for example, your child has been assigned to read for twenty minutes or work on a math activity for ten minutes, use an egg timer, a kitchen timer, or a timer app on your phone to indicate the start and end time. That's helpful for your child, because it provides some structure to the activity, and for you, because you don't have to be the enforcer. Let the timer tell your child when it's okay to move on to other things.

A clipboard can be very helpful for learning at home, according to Jennifer Serravallo. Not only does a clipboard provide a stable writing surface, but a child with a clipboard is mobile and doesn't have to be tied to a desk or table for a writing activity. Especially if you're teaching more than one child, it may be useful to send one child to a bedroom with a clipboard while you're helping a sibling at the kitchen table.

3. Provide several small breaks between learning tasks.

The country of Finland scores very well in academic achievement for young children. One secret to Finnish success is that every hour of learning consists of forty-five minutes of study or instruction and fifteen minutes of break time. Consider adopting that strategy for your child's at-home learning. Go outside if possible. Move away from near-point activities using screens, books, and tabletop projects and games. Remember that too much screen time is unhealthy for young children's eyes. Getting your kids away from their schoolwork for at least a few minutes each hour will help them stay focused and energized.

4. Provide as quiet a place as possible for your student.

It's important to create a "learning atmosphere" for your child. Remember, during the times when your kids are studying, your home becomes a classroom. Do your best to make a distinction between school times and non-school times. Most of the time, kids need a home environment where lots of noise and engagement and activity are encouraged and facilitated. But during study times, kids need a quiet place to learn effectively. That may mean separating squabbling brothers and sisters, if possible. It also means not running the vacuum or a kitchen blender during study hours. And of course, keep the TV turned off.

5. Establish a routine, and try to stick with it.

Children do their best learning in a structured environment, so create routines they can anticipate. This doesn't mean you have to stick to the same exact schedule every day, but in general, learning time should be fairly predictable. Especially in uncertain times, children need a stable environment they can count on. Giving them the same general time each day for schoolwork and at-home learning will help provide the structure they need and crave.

6. Allow your child some choices.

Giving children the freedom to make some of their own decisions is especially important if you have more than one child taking part in at-home learning. It's hard to balance all the care and oversight they need, so give yourself a break and allow your kids to participate in the decision-making. Make a checklist of independent activities, and let each child choose the order in which the tasks are done and then check each item off the list as it is completed.

7. After a task is completed, ask your child questions about it.

Good teachers engage and interact with their students. While you're helping to facilitate at-home learning, you are your child's primary teacher. So don't forget to ask questions about what your children are learning. Ask them to tell you the answer to a math problem in their own words. Have them give you the plot summary about a book they've read. Remember that process is as important as the final answer, so have them explain their work. Look for opportunities to put learning to work in practical ways. A child who is learning about fractions might be able to tell you what percentage of dinner ingredients are vegetable-based. Kids who are learning about multiplication can multiply sets of silverware while setting the table. Younger children can be encouraged to find geometric shapes around the home.

Remember to engage with your child fully. Put away your phone, close the laptop, put down the book, and really listen to what your child is saying. This is a chance for parent-child bonding as much as for learning, so take full advantage.

Despite the difficulties we all face right now, learning at home can be a rewarding experience for both children and parents. By following these seven tips, you will be giving your child a solid foundation to build on as they learn from home.

And Tyndale is here to help! Here are just a few of the many resources available from tyndale.com that can help you facilitate at-home learning for your child.

- Keys to Learning at Home PowerPoint
- [Quarantine Reading List for Kids](#)
- [Tyndale Kids Newsletter](#)
- Quick Guide to 7 Keys to Learning at Home
- Quick Guide to Keys for Learning Math
- Quick Guide to Reading and Writing at Home

We pray God will bless you and your child through this experience.