

Back to School, COVID Edition

Preparing for the New School Year During a Pandemic

As the opening of the new school year draws near, many working parents may find themselves struggling to make the necessary arrangements to ensure a smooth start to the new academic year while also managing the demands of their job. As of this writing, decisions are still being made across state and district lines regarding how schools will reopen in the fall, with some schools offering both online and in-person learning environments and other schools continuing with a strictly online/virtual setting for the time being.

If you have the option of working from home, you have a little more flexibility in terms of being able to manage and oversee the household. For parents in this position, our best recommendations would be:



- **Establish a routine and stick with it.** Be sure to include time for breaks and leisure activities. If two parents are working at home, consider splitting the household responsibilities or “taking shifts” throughout the day. If it is helpful, use a timer to designate unique work and play times.
- **Make your routine visible.** Put the schedule on a large poster board for everyone to see. Include recess time(s), lunch, play time, etc.
- **Make sure your children have the tools necessary to do their jobs.** Will they need a computer, laptop, or tablet access? Is the household WiFi functioning properly with everyone using the Internet throughout the day? Are school supplies (pens, pencils, paper, etc.) readily available?

There are still going to be challenges and stressors for parents working remotely, but you can at least be available for school-age children throughout the day, as needed.







When Remote Work Isn't an Option

But what about employees who can't work from home? How can a parent both manage a household where students will be conducting online learning and be physically present at their job sites to work? The short answer is you cannot be two places at once. You will need help. Fortunately, there are resources available, as well as practical things you can do to ensure the best possible outcomes for your family and your emotional health.

1. **Become an active member or participant in your Parent-Teacher Association or equivalent school organization.** If you aren't already active in the parent-teacher association, now is the time to become an active member. Being a part of these associations not only keeps you in the loop on school events, there is also research that indicates the more involved a parent is in their child's school, the better the outcomes for the student-child.
2. **Voice your concerns.** Advocate for yourself and your family – at PTA meetings, at town halls, at school district meetings. Align yourself with like-minded parents, share resources and tips for success, and make your voice heard at the local level.
3. **Consider your options for childcare.** Since you cannot be two places at once, you will need to tap outside resources for childcare if your children will not be attending school physically during the workday. Consider online resources like [care.com](https://www.care.com) to find a babysitter or contact a family member or trusted friend who has free time during the weekdays.
4. **Think “outside the box.”** If you belong to a church or other religious organization, they may have childcare resources and referrals as well. Teachers and administrative professionals in your area may have taken a leave of absence, resigned, or retired early due to COVID-19 – consider them as a possible resource for childcare, if they are open to that. Check to see if your area has a Facebook group and if other parents are addressing the new school year options. Tap your Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media connections to see if friends or colleagues have kids home from college who may be interested in providing childcare services.
5. **Know your rights as an employee.** Are you familiar with the Families First Coronavirus Response Act? Under new Department of Labor guidelines, depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for certain types of leave or other protections. [Click here](#) to review the Department of Labor's COVID-19 and the Family Medical Leave Act Questions and Answers page. Speak with your HR representative if you believe you may qualify and are interested.
6. **Communicate with your immediate supervisor and your Human Resources department.** Keep your manager and your HR department in the loop. They may have options or suggestions you're not aware of that could really help! At the very least, open and honest communication with your employer will ensure that you are leaving no stone unturned when it comes to managing and mitigating these new challenges.

Stress Management “Cheat Sheet”

Whether you are working remotely and sharing the same space with young learners or working on-site with children at home or in school, something we can all benefit from are quick, basic self-care techniques that we can practice throughout the day to make things a little easier for ourselves. Consider the following steps a stress management “cheat sheet” and implement these techniques as needed.

1.  **Breathe.** Deep breaths, guided abdominal breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation are all good ways to relieve mounting stress. You can do these things on your own or if you'd like a little assistance you can visit LifeAdvisorEAP.com where you can find short video tutorials on breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation.
2.  **Move.** Stand up and stretch your legs periodically throughout the workday. Take a walk outside on your break. A family walk after work is a great way to bond and burn a few calories.
3.  **Hydrate.** Drink more water! According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, an adequate daily intake of fluid for average, healthy adults in a temperate climate is about 15.5 cups (3.7 liters) for men and about 11.5 cups (2.7 liters) for women.
4.  **Be gentle.** As parents, we sometimes feel guilty or overwhelmed with balancing work responsibilities and caring for our children. Take it easy on yourself and realize that no one person can be all things to all people, all the time. Set realistic expectations and don't be hard on yourself if things aren't always perfect.
5.  **Meditate.** You don't have to practice yoga or listen to a meditation podcast to put yourself in a meditative state. Sometimes just being mindful at a rote task can be meditative. Such a task might be washing your hands thoroughly – with warm water, for at least 20 seconds. A great way to practice mindfulness and ensure good health hygiene.
6.  **HALT.** Finally, HALT – which stands for “Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired.” If you are any of those four things, it is a good practice to “halt” what you are doing and address those immediate needs if you can.

Ulliance can help

If you're feeling overwhelmed and need to talk, or if you'd like assistance in locating some of the resources we touched on in this bulletin, contact your Life Advisor EAP for free and confidential assistance with any work/life or personal issue.