Distance Learning During School Closures

*Credit: GSUSA Raising Awesome Girls*



[Coronavirus](https://www.girlscouts.org/en/raising-girls/happy-and-healthy/happy/coronavirus-and-kids.html), or COVID-19, has turned the world as we know it upside down, to say the least. Millions of families are trying to keep the learning alive at home amid virus-related school closures—even while they attempt to adjust to their own new work-from-home realities, stock up on household essentials, and do everything in their power to keep their loved ones healthy. Frankly? It’s a lot.

The good news is that even though you’re social distancing (staying in when possible and keeping at least six feet away from those not in your household), you’re absolutely not alone in this struggle. We talked to a few teachers who’ve been there, done that, and they had some amazingly practical advice for how everyday families can get through this difficult time.

**Put Family and Feelings First**  
These are trying times at best, and the fact is, not all families can make schooling their immediate priority. “Keeping your sanity right now and making sure your children are fed and healthy is, honestly, the first thing you should be focused on right now,” says Dr. Cyndy Karras, an Austin-based [developmental psychologist](https://www.leapconsultingservices.com/) and veteran teacher. Academics are, of course, important, she says, “but these are unprecedented times, and it’s OK to just pause and take a beat to get your family’s mental health on track, if that’s what’s needed. Once you’ve got the social-emotional part under control, the academics and learning will follow.” And if every single item on your child’s school checklist doesn’t get accomplished while they’re learning from home? So be it. “Their academic future is not going to be damaged by this time away from a traditional classroom. Just take a deep breath and do the best you can.”

**Give Kids a Choice and a Voice**  
Sarah Scheldt, a Brooklyn-based [parenting coach](https://sarahscheldt.com/) and veteran elementary school teacher, says it’s important to include your kids when you’re coming up with solutions to new challenges in your family. “Bring your household together to write up a family plan that everyone can agree on—maybe you’ll say the kids will focus on homework packets or read during certain times of the day, and other blocks of time they can choose from a variety of fun activities you come up with together,” she suggests. “These are complicated times, and it’s OK to tell your kids that you need their help and their ideas. Talk about not only what you need from them, but make sure you ask what they need from you. In fact, when you do that, you’re not just getting them to feel more ownership of the plan, you’re teaching them about responsibility, cooperation, and teamwork. Later, if they’re not following the plan, you can revisit what you agreed on together to help get everyone back on track.”

**You’re Not Going to Replicate the Classroom Experience, and That’s OK**  
If your child’s school is offering online classes, that’s great, and they should participate in them as much as possible, but it’s unrealistic to think kids are going to get the same experience from these as they would at school, says Melissa Abrahams, an elementary school teacher in Southern California. “It’s not helpful to pretend that everything is normal right now, because that’s not the reality, and your child knows that. If they are having trouble focusing, give them a break to do something that doesn’t feel like school,” she says. “Watch a movie together and ask your child what they think is going to happen to the characters next and why—that’s critical thinking, or play a board game that involves math and strategy. They’ll be learning without even thinking about it.” This teacher’s favorite non-school activity for kids being temporarily home-schooled? Keeping a diary. “There’s a lot going on right now that your child might want to write about so she/he remembers it later. Plus, it’s a healthy outlet for some of the emotions they are dealing with, and they will be practicing language skills at the same time.”

**Ask for Help with That Homework Packet**  
What happens if your child’s teacher sent home a packet of work, but you don’t have a clue about how to help them with it? “Be honest with your child and let her know that you don’t know all the answers,” says Dr. Karras. “When you admit that you’re not sure how to explain something to her—but that you’re going to find out together—she’ll start to see you as a team and feel even more supported by you.” Then reach out to your social networks, friends who may have expertise in that subject, or even parents and caregivers of other students in your child’s class. “The reason why there are so many free resources for distance learning right now is because people know these are difficult times and really want to help in whatever way they can. You are absolutely not alone.”

**Keep It Bite-Sized and Kid-Friendly**  
If you had visions of your child sitting at the kitchen table, studying for two or more hours at a time, Scheldt says you might be asking a bit much of them. “For kids ages six through twelve, it’s far more realistic to have them do focused work for 20 minutes at a time or so and then take a brain break with something else that’s quick and fun.” As for what your child should be learning about beyond any formal homework, Scheldt says to let them decide. “If she’s into a certain TV show, movie, or book, she could use household items to make puppets of the characters and act out the story. Or if she loves a certain family recipe, you can teach her how to make it. Have her count how many eggs you’re using. Ask her why she thinks certain ingredients are needed. This is a lesson in following directions, chemistry, math, and a big dose of family traditions all rolled into one.”

*Provided by Girl Scouts Arizona Cactus-Pine Council (GSACPC), a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization serving more than 20,000 girls grades K-12. Membership also includes over 10,000 adult volunteers who serve as leaders, trainers, consultants, and board members. Learn more at girlscoutsaz.org or follow them on social media @gsacpc*

**Side Bar (scroll down for image)**

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