

# Engaging With Your Teen While Learning At Home

Learning from home is not easy and can be a challenge for everyone: students, teachers and especially parents. Remember: you are not your teen's teacher, you are their guide, their supporter and main encourager. Teens are grieving many losses: traditional school, social life, extra curricular activities, and in some instances their jobs. Also, they have had no choice but to become accustomed to virtual teaching (a huge learning curve!). To top it off, families are likely getting on each other's nerves from spending so much time together. Basically, there is a lot of stress and frustration going around! Below are some sanity tips to help get you through this difficult time:

1. Stay calm, don't panic, relax - your teen and their education are going to be ok. Allow for creativity with their schedule. Online school is not at all like a normal school day. Allow for some leeway with their morning routines and bedtimes.
2. Connect with the teacher. They will be your greatest asset and will be happy to assist you. Ask for a schedule of face to face meets that your teen needs to check in. Write down the schedule where you and your teen can see it. Ask to be invited to their google classroom so you get daily updates on what assignments your teen is working on.
3. Encourage your teen to take a lot of breaks. At minimum, they should work for 20-30 minutes, then take a 10 minute movement break. Should you start to feel annoyed when you see them become distracted, see #1, their days do not necessarily need to follow a 9-3 schedule.
4. Creating a special space dedicated just for school work will make it easier for your teen to concentrate. Preferably a place separate from where they watch TV, game and eat. It does not need to be fancy but is ideal if it can be left undisturbed. If you are short on space, keep all supplies in a tote so it can be put away during meal time. Your teen will appreciate not having a constant reminder of work once their "school day" is done. Also, your teen does not have to actually SIT to learn, they can put on headphones and walk around, sit in the backyard, or on a yoga ball. Think outside the box.
5. Rather than punish or threaten your teen, for missing a "class" or not completing an assignment, have them earn privileges. Learn what motivates them best and use that as the reward (game of cards with you, coffee, their favorite meal or dessert, going for a "physically distant" walk with a friend, extra screen time, going for a drive).
6. Routine and schedules are important, but don't sweat it if your teen is resisting any schedule that you have well intentionally written out. One of my teens is more like a feral, nocturnal animal. She is motivated to do her school work after 11pm, whereas my

other teen likes to have his work done by 2pm, with no issues getting up early. Most teens' lives were structured and regimented before the pandemic, and with a sudden loss of boundaries, their pace of life has slowed and the pressures have eased.

7. What about the endless amount of screentime?? I questioned several teens and their prevailing message was this (and validated by experts): parents need to stop stressing about it. Snapchat, Tic Toc, Facetime, House Party etc. are the only way that our teens are maintaining connections. They NEED this connection. Yes, probably not at 2 or 3am, but there are plenty of creative ways to limit phones, WIFI, or apps if necessary.
8. Learning is not just about academics right now. Our teens are learning new hobbies and are getting creative all on their own: baking, dancing, cooking, gardening, construction, sewing, politics, interior decorating, graphic designing, exercise, art, budgeting, grocery shopping, etc. It is okay that these hobbies are blended with long stretches of Netflix-binging, mingled with a little school work.
9. Melt downs are going to happen. Whether it is you, your teen, or both! Not everyday is Instagram worthy. There is a silver lining each day. Some positives could be that you're having meals together regularly, playing more board games, getting neglected projects accomplished together. None of us are at our best right now, so give yourself - and your teen - a break. Try not to be over controlling. Though your teen is not little anymore, they are still experiencing BIG emotions which may come across as negative behavior.

The reality is, your job as a parent right now is less about academics and more about encouraging resilience and creating a sense of calm for your teen. The most important thing you can teach them during this time is how to manage big feelings under stress.

Be sure you look after yourself too. Don't feel guilty about practicing healthy coping strategies, that is teaching your teen how to cope.

**Resources:** [additudemag.com](http://additudemag.com); [greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu); [prodigygame.com](http://prodigygame.com); [futurelean.com](http://futurelean.com); [powerhomeschool.org](http://powerhomeschool.org); [bostonglobe.com](http://bostonglobe.com)

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