



Widener Child Therapy Clinic

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Bringing Accommodations into the Living Room

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While children are staying at home due to the coronavirus/ COVID-19 outbreak, having routine and structure in place will make these unusual circumstances a bit easier. Most school districts are providing resources to help with at-home learning. Check out your school's website to see what they are suggesting.

Children with identified disabilities who may have IEPs or 504 plans when at school will especially benefit from routine. Here are some general strategies to help families make at-home learning go a little more smoothly. Every child has unique learning needs, so consider this guide a starting point to help you figure out what fits your child.

ADHD

For children with ADHD, being cooped up at home may test their limits. Things may look different from how their classmates or neighbors are learning from home, and that's okay. Many children with ADHD will need more engaging lessons to help them focus, and/or more frequent breaks to not overload their systems. Here are some ideas to try:

- Create a daily, visual schedule and keep it on display. The more involved children are in making it, the more invested they will be.
 - Try to include fun or calming activities with learning assignments.
 - Before starting school work, create a list of tasks that will be completed and put it where your child can see it. Allow your child to cross off each task as they complete it.
- Keep tasks simple. Shorter tasks help children focus and not get overwhelmed.
- Remind your child to read the directions and then have them explain them to you to show they understand. Simplify instructions and avoid giving too many directions at one time.
- Allow your child to stand up or use a fidget while doing work.
- Provide movement breaks every 5 or 10 minutes, such as jumping jacks, running in place, yoga, walking around the home, etc.

Note: If your child is struggling with a task, have them talk through their thinking. **Praise** them for their efforts. If they continue to struggle, let them have a break and then let them move on to a different activity until you can help them.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal feeling that everyone experiences. Right now, many people are feeling more anxious than usual in response to new unknowns. Children with anxiety disorders already feel anxious and worried to an overwhelming degree, which can get in the way of learning.

- Learn to recognize signs that your child is more stressed out than usual. Is it in their facial expression, or in the things they are saying? Are they behaving differently and in a way that seems unusual?
- Recognize and label their feelings. Help them see that it is okay to feel anxious, and that things are unusual right now.
- Let your child know that they can manage their big feelings. If heightened anxiety means not doing a math assignment at this moment, that's okay. Take some deep breaths, enjoy a calm moment together. Ask them when or how you can help them get back to doing their work, and then have the child return to the assignment.
- Remind them to be kind to themselves. Anxious brains tend to blame themselves until the worries get bigger and bigger. Try to slow that down by saying "I know this is scary. I'm here for you and we are in this together."
- It is important to validate children's concerns while focusing on age-appropriate amounts of information paired with what is being done to keep people safe.
- Children look to parents and other caregiving adults to guide reactions. Managing our own anxieties helps children manage theirs.

OCD

Children with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder might be struggling with the current state of the world. Remind your child that they have the abilities to fight back against their obsessions and compulsions; you are there right alongside them for support.

- Try to set up a quiet learning environment to help them not get overwhelmed.
- Sometimes OCD can get in the way of getting things done quickly. Your child may need to take extra time to complete tasks. Let them know taking their time is okay and you appreciate their effort.
- If OCD in your child means having to do things perfectly, keep an eye on when they may be struggling with doing things over and over again. Praise your child for trying and let them know it is okay to make mistakes.
- Too many problems on one page makes it hard to focus on work without worrying. Break up assignments by covering some up, or putting only a few on each page.
- Agree on a phrase/word that your child can use when OCD is taking over and they need a break.
- Your child will benefit from having a schedule in place, but one that is not too rigid. Allow room for options. For example, allow your child to choose which subject to focus on each day, what they might like to have for lunch, or what family activity everyone can participate in.

Specific Learning Disabilities

Children with identified learning differences are used to having personalized lessons that support their needs. No one expects parents to become skilled special education providers, but these tips may help your kids learn better at home.

Reading

- Have your child read something daily that interests them. Even better, read along with them and discuss it.
- When listening to them read, refrain from correcting small errors.
- Have your child summarize what they have read to see that they understand.

Written Expression

- Have your child tell you their answers while you write them down. Then, select parts of what you've written to have them copy.
- Make your own set of alphabet letters by writing out letters, coloring them, and cutting them out. Using physical items is more fun than writing words out.
- Have your child pick out words to include on a spelling list. If they pick words that feel important to them, they might enjoy it more.

Math

- Before starting a word problem, have them circle key words that tell them what operation to use. Encourage them to show their work so you can find where mistakes are made.
- If your child struggles with lining up numbers to complete math problems, turning lined-paper horizontally can be helpful.
- If your child is struggling with basic addition or subtraction, use household items to help them understand this concept.

A Note for Parents

Not only is this a difficult time for children, but for parents as well. You may be juggling many things in addition to figuring out how to help your child with schoolwork during this time of school closures. You are not a professional teacher. If these tips and strategies are hard to do and not getting through to your child, that's okay. The best teaching you can be doing is ensuring that your children feel safe and loved at this time.

Free Resources for Special Education Needs (retrieved from greatphillyschools.org)

[K-8 Interactive Mathematics Lessons](#)

[Dog on a Log Books](#) Free books you can download and print, created by a mom who homeschools two children, one with dyslexia

[Starfall](#) For grades PreK-3, free interactive and creative phonics and math lessons