10 ways to reduce stress during virtual learning

1. TURN OFF PHONES AND ELECTRONICS Email, text and app notifications are distractions that undermine learning. The *Journal of Educational Psychology* found that students who tried to divide their attention between lectures and smartphones had lower test scores and poor retention skills. Parents should consider a **no-phone policy during virtual instructional time**..

2. KEEP A ROUTINE   Children have less anxiety and more focus when they know what is expected of them. While virtual learning is less-restrictive than in-school, it's still important to **maintain a schedule**. During weekdays, make sure children wake up, get dressed, eat lunch, enjoy free play, etc., at the same times each day. It will be easier to transition from non-preferred activities if they know the plan ahead of time.

3. GET AT LEAST 30-MIN OF MOVEMENT Simple **exercises can do wonders for the mind** and body. Children are used to recess, gym, switching classes and, in some cases, being able to "shake their sillies" out in school; Age-appropriate dance videos on YouTube Kids or GoNoodle.com are great for elementary-age kids. A brisk walk, shooting hoops or a quick bike ride works for both children and adults.

4.. DESIGNATE A SPACE FOR HOME LEARNING To minimize distractions and foster attentiveness, **a specific area should be used consistently** as the at-home learning space. It can be a table, desk, or corner of a bedroom. Keep the area free from clutter and make sure all school materials are accessible nearby. Also, make the child responsible for tidying up the area at the end of each day as they would normally do in their traditional classroom space.

5. SCHEDULE BREAKS Children in school do not sit at a desk for 7 hours straight each day. At most, they go just 40-50 minutes at a time before getting up to walk around, change classrooms or going to lunch/recess. Use timers at home to **make sure frequent breaks take place**. This will help curb mental fatigue, screen-time headaches and mood swings.

6. PLAN SOCIAL TIMES The best part of school is being able to socialize with peers. Kids are missing daily interaction with friends and the camaraderie that comes from being together in a classroom. Consider **planning Zoom "social" lunch breaks** each day with a small group of friends. Kids can also socialize from a distance using other apps like Facebook Messenger or House Party during what would normally be "group work" time. You can even try organizing weekly virtual trivia games or book club meetings to keep them connected with peers.

7. TRY NEW THINGS OFTEN In physical classroom spaces, children often get to try new instruments, perform hands-on experiments, create art from mixed media, and engage in a host of other tactile experiences. Break up the monotony of distance learning and **bring experiential learning into the home** by incorporating a new activity each week. Things to try: flying a kite, knitting a doll's blanket, making a bird feeder, or planting pumpkin seeds.

8. SEPARATE HOUSE CHORES FROM SCHOOL TIME Adults who worked from home before COVID-19 will tell you it's important to work on one task at a time and to **keep housework separate from "work"-work**. Children can become overwhelmed if they are thinking about having to clean their room while taking a math test or writing an essay. Try to let them think only about schoolwork during school hours.

9. GO OUTSIDE Vitamin D is not only essential for growth and bone development, but research shows it can also reduce feelings of depression and improve moods. Adults & children should make sure they are **getting outside for at least 30-min per day**, weather permitting, to ensure greater health and happiness.

10. FOCUS ON THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL Remember, this is a new situation for everyone. Teachers, children, parents, employers are all learning to navigate this new and strange situation at the same time without a blueprint for success and to the best of our abilities. **Be patient with yourself and with others.**

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