

EDUCATION

guide

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EDUCATION

How are we equipping students to succeed in science?



With the right online platforms, teachers can continue students' science learning outside of school.

(BPT) — Scientists across the world are charging forward in the fight to prevent and treat COVID-19. And they're harnessing the latest tech and science as they press down on the accelerator at a speed unattainable to date.

But another fight is also playing out during this unprecedented challenge: the urgent need to educate young people while schools remain closed.

As science dominates headlines and dinner conversations, it's integral that all young people better understand and appreciate science and the role it plays in society. Science literacy can no longer be a luxury or an add-on in an age when it should be embedded into how every sector responds to complex challenges.

The shift to remote learning

For many young people, their first introduction to science at school is through teachers, who clearly deserve appreciation and the deepest thanks right now. Yet as teachers everywhere — 63 million primary and secondary teachers around the world, according to UN News — have had to rapidly transition to online learning to reach the 1.2 billion children currently out of school around the world, many don't have the resources and support they need to teach successfully.

Among schools in the United States, teachers in the most economically disadvantaged districts are least likely to be able to provide online learning oppor-

tunities for all students, according to Education Week. Today's school closures magnify the inequities that were always present in society and schooling before COVID-19.

So how can science teachers, far from their classrooms, best encourage a scientific mindset that is needed now more than ever to understand the world? One solution is LabXchange, an online community for learning, sharing and collaboration. This free platform, launched by Harvard University and the Amgen Foundation, makes science accessible to hundreds of thousands of high school and college students.

Online science platforms support teachers

LabXchange's virtual simulations remove barriers of expensive equipment, safety issues, and the extra time teachers need to prepare materials for school labs, which is beneficial now more than ever when teachers are shifting how they deliver science education. Free, comprehensive online platforms like LabXchange, Khan Academy and others can meaningfully advance students' learning and interest in science, even when they aren't at school.

"When young people learn science, they need to be able to make mistakes, to be creative, to try something again and again by experimenting without worrying about breaking something," says Dr. Scott Heimlich, vice president of the Amgen Foundation.

"Failure is an inherent part of the scientific process, but too often the way science is taught in school leaves no time for mistakes or creativity or play," Heim-

lich says. "Even with its limits, technology can indeed support teachers to meet their lesson goals by embedding our latest understanding of how students learn into the design process."

Meeting teachers' and students' needs

Well-designed programs should put teachers in the driver's seat. In-person lab programs like the 30-year-old Amgen Biotech Experience have laid a strong groundwork for how best to reach students, especially those in underserved communities, by engaging them in science. While technology is best used to complement or supplement in-person instruction, the Amgen Biotech Experience labs are now available virtually through LabXchange, showing how an online experience can be used to teach lab skills remotely.

With a platform like this, science teachers can remix high-quality, curated resources into customized learning pathways for different groups of students with different needs. Teachers can also embed their own content along with assessments to gauge their students' learning and understanding.

A scientific mindset

For science to be accessible to all, especially now, the world needs more forward-looking educational technology that gives teachers and students the tools they need to foster a scientific mindset. All around us today, scientists are leveraging the most powerful tools and platforms in the fight against this virus. Science teachers — and their students — deserve the same.

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3 ways families can better prepare for the school year

(BPT) — The beginning of a new school year always means change, but this back-to-school season will look a bit different. Whether students are taught virtually or in a classroom environment, it will create challenges for teachers, families and kids alike. Kleenex® brand child wellness expert and board-certified attending family physician, Deborah Gilboa, M.D., weighs in with her top tips for families to help prepare for the upcoming school year.

Identify the right resources

One thing in high demand for teachers this year is support from communities. It's important to ensure teachers have the resources they need to lead student learning for both online and in-person settings. Everything from basic supplies to materials that promote

learning and overall well-being can help kids manage stress, but teachers often need help acquiring those supplies. That's why Kleenex® brand is donating up to \$1.2 million in 2020 to fund requests from teachers on the education nonprofit crowdfunding site DonorsChoose.

"When students have the resources they need to learn and stay well, achievement can thrive," said Charles Best, founder of DonorsChoose. "This upcoming school year holds many unknowns for educators, and we're grateful for this support from Kleenex® brand, which has helped equip over 2,500 teachers and 176,500 students with materials they need to continue learning."

Prepare for a new routine

A big part of going back to school is getting into a new rou-

tine as a family and being flexible knowing things will continue to change. Gilboa recommends introducing a similar school schedule weeks before school starts, so parents are able to help children adjust and make changes as needed.

"Having kids practice what is expected of them with these new guidelines will help them feel more prepared when it's time for school to start," says Gilboa. "Whether it's packing their backpack or starting the morning with structured activities such as reading or coloring, having this routine will help kids transition better into the school year."

Don't underestimate a child's stress

Research shows that most elementary school children report some symptoms of nerves or anxiety around returning to school



each year. In these unprecedented times, those numbers are expected to rise dramatically. According to Gilboa, the biggest signs of stress to look out for in kids include behavior, sleep and appetite changes, difficulty with normal communication, or not enjoying things they normally do.

"Kids will pick up on their parents' stress leading up to the school year, so it's important to remember to manage your stress and reactions appropriately," said Gilboa. "To help understand your

kids' true feelings, ask questions to encourage them to share good and bad experiences. This way, when your child is going through something stressful, they have the practice and expectation that they can talk about it with their parents."

Parents can start by encouraging kids to share a couple of good things that happened in the day, and also a challenge. Questions could include "what moment made you smile today" or "tell me about a moment you wish you could erase."

The upcoming school year will feel overwhelming but taking extra time to understand and communicate with kids and their teachers will help everyone feel more in control and prepared for the school year. To join Kleenex® brand in funding the resources needed for students and teachers this year, please visit DonorsChoose.org/Kleenex.

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Stressed as a parent? No- and low-cost ways to educate and entertain kids

(BPT) — Having children is a great joy, but it also can be stressful. Pressures are plentiful, from making sure your child has the right gear to needing to help manage their school and social schedules. To intensify matters, COVID-19 has brought quarantines and social distancing around the world, and parents are now tasked with educating and entertaining their kids more than ever before.

Financial stress is growing dramatically. A whopping 71% of parents are worried about their personal finances right now, and 81% describe their level of parenting stress as medium or high, according to the OfferUp 2020 Parents and Kids Recommerce Report.

In addition to financial concerns, there is a multitude of challenges for parents during these unique times. Keeping kids entertained at home is the No. 1 cause of stress for parents during the pandemic, followed by educating

their children at home, the study found.

Keeping kids on top of their studies as well as happily entertained doesn't require spending a lot of money. Consider these low- and no-cost ways to keep your children occupied at home:

Seek free educational resources

Go online to discover a variety of high-quality educational websites. Many museums are now offering virtual tours and online educational classes to engage kids of all ages. Educational websites such as Khan Academy and Sesame Street offer no-cost learning materials. Remember to sign up for newsletters from parenting organizations as well to get free activity ideas sent right to your email.

It's also smart to reach out to your children's school or local community center to explore op-

tions. Some offer memberships to websites that they can share so you can access material at no cost. Additionally, you can call and ask your local library about digital storytimes and virtual classes they might be holding, which can be a fun way to connect kids with others while they learn.

Find what you need through local resale opportunities

Have your kids played with all their toys and need some new supplies? Parents are turning to online resale marketplaces such as OfferUp to buy baby and kids items during the coronavirus pandemic with the goal to save money, make more sustainable purchasing decisions and support their local communities. Whether it's a new toy or a necessary supply, you can find just what you need for less.

You can also consider selling what you no longer use and make some money as a family. OfferUp is the largest mobile marketplace in the nation for local buyers and sellers and it's as easy as taking a picture with your phone to sell items and then meet with local people in a safe, secure manner. Millions of people buy and sell on OfferUp every year, and billions of dollars' worth of items are exchanged. Why not make it a family effort to clean out rooms, sell unused items and save toward a group goal?

Don't forget traditional fun and acts of kindness

Old-fashioned fun is low cost and keeps kids entertained. Have family game nights and bust out the board games, work on puzzles together or start a crafting project. Go outside to play yard games, catch or kick around a soccer ball. Work on a time cap-

sule, scrapbook or teach your children a hobby. Think about all the things older generations did to stay busy when people spent less time online and find your inspiration.

To help spread positivity when so many people are stressed, consider simple things you can do from afar to spread cheer. Kids will enjoy brainstorming acts of kindness, and most don't cost anything. For example, write inspiring messages on the sidewalk for people to see as they walk by, or color pictures to send to a local nursing home for residents who may not be able to receive visitors.

Keeping kids educated and entertained while at home shouldn't cause financial stress. Follow these tips to save money and keep kids happy.

Recommerce or reverse commerce, refers to the process of selling previously owned, new or used products

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How to make the most of online learning

(BPT) — The flexibility to learn and earn a degree online allows students nationwide — from full-time employees to single parents and more — to achieve goals while managing family and life. Millions of students study online today, and those numbers are only increasing.

While online education provides students with a range of opportunities, it also can present challenges of learning in a new environment. Arizona State University staff and students who teach and study online offer their tips to help ensure your success.

Set yourself up for success

Before starting a degree program online, plan ahead. Give yourself space and time to study, as well as technology tools to do your best.

Give yourself space

“A quiet workplace without any

interruption from roommates or family is necessary for success in an online course,” advises the university’s director of student services, Joseph Chapman.

If your space isn’t completely quiet, noise-canceling headphones can help you focus. For shared spaces, let roommates or family know when you’re in study mode.

Check your tech

Lauren Permoda, program coordinator for ASU Online, recommends using a desktop or laptop for all your studies, as a tablet or phone may not be the best tools for most tasks.

Familiarize yourself with your school’s learning platform and keep information about tech support handy. Ensure that you have multiple browsers (such as Chrome or Firefox) available, as one might work better for some programs than others.

Organize your time

Time management is key to learning online, as you must take the initiative and be accountable for your own work, without instructors or parents looking over your shoulder.

Master of Healthcare Innovation alumni Alicia Gillum said her first task at the beginning of each semester is to review every class syllabus and put due dates for papers, assignments and exams in her calendar — plus reminders a few days ahead of each due date.

“My advice is to start your assignments ahead of time,” says Gillum. “It’ll be so much less stressful than waiting until the last minute to do it.”

Miranda Gaona, who’s graduating with her Master’s in Digital Audience Strategy this month, says she treats every online class like an in-person class, schedul-

ing it in her calendar as an important appointment. Gaona also sets reminders and alarms for study time — building in breaks for snacks and resting.

Communicate

Stay connected to your instructors, classmates and school community. Take advantage of opportunities to collaborate, share insights and ask questions. Goana says she joins social media groups and participates in class discussions as much as possible.

Add your instructors’ virtual office hours in your calendar, so you know when they’ll be available. Email instructors or use class discussion boards to ask questions or offer comments. Instructors like seeing student engagement and participating will improve your overall experience.

Master of Art in Sociology student Drew McDowell also recom-

mends communicating regularly with your “offline” support network — your friends, family and/or coworkers who may need to be patient as you devote more time to completing your coursework.

Find the right program for you

If you haven’t begun your studies, or you’re looking to transfer, find a program that meets your needs. Research universities that offer the degree or certification program you’re looking for online, and that are specifically designed and have dedicated resources to work with online learners.

Find an accredited degree program associated with a reputable university that offers the same curriculum and instructors as ground schools. U.S. News and World Report provides helpful rankings of universities and degree programs.



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Wellness tips for families with ADHD

(BPT) — Families are spending more time together than ever before, making it challenging for parents and caregivers to balance their personal needs with that of a child's. For those families that include a child with ADHD, maintaining mental, physical and emotional wellness is particularly crucial for all members.

Dr. Greg Mattingly, psychiatrist and associate clinical professor at Washington University in St. Louis, offers the following tips on how to maintain wellness at home, especially while parenting a child with ADHD:

Stay positive and set realistic expectations

Behaviors can change and improve over time, so it is important to keep a positive mindset and attitude. Try to establish consistent expectations, along with a system for rewards and consequences, offering praise whenever possible (e.g., 3-5 positives for every negative when working through challenges). Be sure to also lead by example: children benefit from modeling healthy behavior and positive interactions as it has been shown to improve attention, concentration and impulse control in children with ADHD.

Get into a routine

Try setting a daily schedule to establish expectations, allowing clear windows for activities such as meals, schoolwork, play and bedtime. Some children with ADHD also benefit from clocks or phone timers to transition from one activity to the next or a "check off" list that allows you and your child to feel a sense of accomplishment. While scheduling every minute of the day is by no means nec-

essary (especially in the summer months), identifying a routine that is both predictable and flexible can ensure the whole family is able to enjoy each other's company.

Beyond setting a schedule for a child with ADHD, it is equally as important to allow "me time" as a parent or caregiver. Be it a virtual yoga/exercise class, video calls with friends or family, walks or enjoying a few chapters of a book, any activities that help reduce stress are important enough to prioritize.

Create a space for focus

Be it academics or arts and crafts, it is important for children with ADHD to have moments of calm, free of overstimulation. Creating a space for kids to relax and have some time to themselves is particularly beneficial for kids with ADHD. Use tactile outlets, such as stress balls or fidget spinners, as a way for them to release physical energy while focusing on an individual task at-hand.

Remember knowledge is power

Developing strategies for a child with ADHD can be challenging at times, but there is a wealth of digital resources that can be easily obtained right at home to overcome obstacles along the way. MoreToADHD.com breaks down signs of ADHD and the diagnosis journey, along with educational videos and coping tips for children, parents and caregivers. With understanding comes confidence and comfort, allowing families to stay happy, healthy and well, leaning on the vast ADHD community to work through challenges both big and small.



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EDUCATION

Now's a good time to start saving for college

(BPT) — With the end of an unconventional school year, parents around the country are faced with the daunting challenge of saving for their children's college education. The cost of college is rising, and many American households are already wrestling with their existing student debt. According to NerdWallet, the collective student debt in the U.S. has climbed to \$1.6 trillion and shows no signs of decreasing.

Saving for college may seem like an overwhelming task, especially amid the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, but there are options available to help make the impossible become possible. One option that all parents and students should consider is a 529 college savings

plan, which offers a tax advantage to encourage saving for future higher education costs. Tax-advantaged treatment applies to savings used for qualified education expenses. State tax treatment varies.

"Saving for higher education is critical, even during times of uncertainty," said Russ Tipper, senior vice president at Capital Group, home of American Funds®, and one of the world's leading investment management firms. "A 529 college savings plan can be a valuable investment tool and offers an attractive gift option for family members who may also wish to contribute."

How 529 plans work

With a 529 plan, the earnings are not taxed when you

use the money for qualified education expenses. If withdrawals are used for purposes other than qualified education expenses, the earnings will be subject to a 10% federal tax penalty in addition to federal and, if applicable, state income tax. States take different approaches to the income tax treatment of withdrawals. For example, withdrawals for K-12 expenses may not be exempt from state tax in certain states. Here are a few more reasons to consider a 529 plan:

- Families can contribute up to \$15,000 (\$30,000 for married couples) annually, without gift-tax consequences. Under a special election, you can invest up to \$75,000 (\$150,000 for married couples) at one time by



accelerating five years' worth of investments.

- 529 plans are flexible. In addition to standard college costs, qualified education expenses from 529 plans can be used to pay an elementary, secondary, private or religious school (for K-12 tuition up to a maximum of \$10,000 incurred during the taxable year per beneficiary), vocational school, community college, online educational courses and graduate programs.

- New law further expands uses for 529 plans. Under the SECURE Act, 529 plans can now be used to pay the principal or interest (up to a \$10,000 lifetime maximum) on any qualified student loans of a designated beneficiary or the designated beneficiary's sibling. For distributions made after December 31, 2018, qualified education expenses include expenses for fees, books, supplies and equipment required for the participation of a designated beneficiary in certain apprenticeship programs.

- The account owner can change the beneficiary at any time without tax consequences if the new beneficiary is a member of the family.

- These accounts can be used by anyone looking to go back to school to obtain a degree or seeking to take classes to learn a new skill. Adults can set up 529 plans to cover their own educational

expenses.

- Anyone can contribute to a child's 529 savings plan — parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends could have the opportunity to gift a contribution that goes directly to education savings.

- There are also tax and estate planning benefits. Assets grow free from federal and, in many cases, state taxes if withdrawals are used to pay qualified education expenses. Your contributions are free of gift taxes and can help pare down one's estate and reduce potential estate taxes.

- For people living with disabilities, consider a tax-advantaged savings plan such as ABLEAmerica, which is designed to help individuals with disabilities and their families pay for qualified expenses. Tax-advantaged treatment applies to savings used for qualified disability expenses. State tax treatment varies.

Saving early pays off

Millennials — many of whom are already impacted by their own student loan debt — are focused on saving for their children's future education. According to a survey issued by Capital Group, 31% of millennials report that not having enough money to pay for their children's education keeps them up at night. One in three millennials also ranked 529 college savings plans as an important ben-

efit an employer could offer.

"Starting to save for college earlier truly pays off. Most families begin saving for college at least seven years before they expect to use the money. However, beneficiaries about to enter college (age 18 to day) have typically saved less than one year's worth of estimated public college expenses. Investing early is critical to helping with minimizing the need for student loans and, ultimately, eliminating student loan debt," said Tipper.

How to choose a 529 plan

Working with a financial professional can help with long-term financial planning. A financial professional can help families understand their choices and determine which investment approaches make sense.

CollegeAmerica®, the nation's largest 529 college savings plan,¹ is a strong option that offers low expenses and flexible,² easy-to-use investment options, including target date funds.

Most importantly, do your homework and select the right 529 plan for your family — one that will pay off in the long run. Determine investment goals and then find a plan with flexibility, low fees and low minimum investment requirements.

1 Largest by assets, according to the IQ 2020 "529 College Savings Quarterly Update" from ISS Market Intelligence.

2 "529 College Savings Quarterly Fee Analysis," ISS Market Intelligence, 4Q 2019. CollegeAmerica's fees were in the top quartile of 30 and 18 plans based on the average annual asset-based fees for national advisor-sold and fee-based advisor-sold 529 plans, respectively.

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EDUCATION

Five tips to financially prepare for college this fall

(BPT) — For many students starting or returning to school this fall, the experience may be far different from what they envisioned last year. In response to COVID-19, a number of colleges and universities are temporarily moving to virtual learning models. At the same time, there are colleges and universities planning to reopen with new social distancing measures—some still determining exactly how to best proceed.

Not only has COVID-19 been an obstacle for how you'll physically go to college, but also a setback for how students and parents plan to pay for their education. So, what are some strategies to help you stay on track with your financial plan for college?

1. Tally up all the costs of attendance.

“Education costs will increasingly play a central role in a student’s decision of when or where they attend school,” said Aaron Aggerwal, senior vice president of credit cards and education lending at Navy Federal Credit Union. “As you solidify how much space is in your budget to pay for school, be sure to consider expenses beyond tuition, such as room and board, transportation, a computer, and textbooks. This will help you create a reasonable and realistic financial plan.”

2. Talk to your school’s financial aid office.

If you previously submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and need to alter it, contact your financial aid office. You may qualify

for more assistance or ask them to reassess your financial aid package in order to help you afford the cost of school. This may be especially beneficial if your finances have changed since you first applied.

3. Explore private student loans for bridging any funding gap.

Given the rising expenses for education, there’s a chance the financial assistance you received from the federal student loan program, grants or scholarships isn’t enough to entirely cover your college costs. Thus, private student loans can help fill this funding gap.

“When you’re researching private student loans, find the best rate with features that meet your individual needs,” added Aggerwal. “For example, we offer a 0.25% interest rate reduction for setting up automatic payments; a benefit like this simplifies making payments and helps you save money. We also offer payment options to lower your monthly payment while you’re in school.”

If you’re worried about getting approved for a private student loan, a co-signer could increase your chances. Lenders, like Navy Federal, may allow a co-signer to be released from the loan once a qualifying borrower has entered full repayment or graduated, and has made a total of 24 consecutive, on-time payments.

4. Stay in-state or take classes at a community college.

In-state tuition is consid-

erably less expensive than out-of-state tuition. You may also save on tuition and related costs by taking classes at a local community college before school begins or during school breaks. Just be sure to confirm before enrolling that the credits will transfer to the college or university of your choice.

5. Already have student loans? Consider refinancing or consolidating them.

Many lenders will allow you to refinance and consolidate federal and private student loans together. Also if you’re graduating this fall or have parent PLUS loans, this strategy could help you save on interest and get a lower monthly payment.

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EDUCATION

How teachers can prepare for successful distance learning this fall

(BPT) — The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most disruptive event in the history of K-12 education, closing 120,000 schools and affecting 55 million students in the U.S.

And educators have been challenged like never before. According to a survey commissioned by University of Phoenix, K-12 teachers often felt overwhelmed and under-supported. Teachers reported spending almost as much time prepping for virtual teaching (3.13 hours) as they spent actively teaching (3.97 hours), and less than half (47%) felt that available training was good or excellent.

Having too much information could be as taxing as not having enough, making it difficult to determine which tools were best. Forty-one percent of teachers felt overwhelmed by the many resources provided to help them navigate virtual learning.

During the next 90 days, schools and teachers will develop their resources for teaching this fall.

“Most schools are beginning their preparation by learning from what they experienced when schools closed — what were they prepared for, and more importantly, where they fell short,” says Pam Roggeman, dean of the college of education at University of Phoenix. “There are a number of learning and communication tools available that provide methods and space for education to happen, but tools are only as good as the teachers who are managing them.”

Roggeman offers tips for educators preparing for the upcoming year.

Conduct a needs assessment of yourself

“Before diving into the sea of free resources, apps, etc., first decide what you already know and then what you need to know to better serve the needs of your students,” advises Roggeman.

Stay positive, she says, and be open to adapting to changing needs and circumstances. Be willing to readjust plans when some-



Creating a plan for the upcoming school year is crucial in these uncertain times. By utilizing resources like the Virtual Teaching Academy and focusing on individual student needs, teachers can help students be more successful in their education — even at a distance.

thing isn't working.

Learn from peers

Talk to colleagues, sharing notes about what worked this past term, and what didn't. Explore articles and resources from educators who faced similar challenges.

“Tap into one of the best free resources — your peers,” says Roggeman. “Take this time to learn what sound distance learning looks like.”

Collaborate with administrators and school counselors to focus not only on teaching methods, but also supporting the mental wellness of students during this uncertain time.

Use resources designed in response to current circumstances

For example, the Virtual Teaching Academy, taking place June 26-July 1, is a free resource for K-12 educators, leaders and administrators who are seeking expert guidance and tangible in-

sights on best practices for navigating the upcoming school year.

The Academy is hosted by The Alliance for Virtual Learning, a new initiative spearheaded by University of Phoenix and Blackboard — a leading education technology company for teaching, learning and student engagement — that unites a network of educators, experts and administrators who are shaping the blueprint for new education models that combine the best of virtual and classroom teaching.

Virtual Teaching Academy attendees will acquire necessary insights to create a blueprint to help their schools and districts prepare for the uncertain school year ahead.

Create a plan to stay connected to parents regardless of technology access level

During this challenging time, parents and teachers rely on each other to educate their kids — the parent-teacher relationship is crucial for success of a child's virtual education. Make a plan to stay connected with even the least technologically well-equipped homes.

“Technology is a tool for the educational process, not the answer to good distance learning,” says Roggeman. “Many districts are dealing with how to reach all students, which includes solving access issues such as no Wi-Fi in the home or homes whose only ‘screens’ are cell phones.”

Creative thinking is key to helping families bridge the digital divide. Find low-tech ways to deliver curriculum and feedback, using telephone and mail communication, television and books. Help parents find internet access and ways to use a cell phone to access content.

Focus on the needs of each student

Every student has a different home situation and unique learning needs, which requires teachers to approach virtual learning with flexibility and empathy. Despite distance, many of the same best practices apply as in-classroom teaching:

- Connect with students
- Give meaningful academic feedback
- Diagnose learners' individual needs
- Address the needs of the “whole” child

Creating a plan for the upcoming school year is crucial in these uncertain times. By utilizing resources like the Virtual Teaching Academy and focusing on individual student needs, teachers can help students be more successful in their education — even at a distance.

EDUCATION

Fostering independent play is more important than ever for parents continuing to work from home

(BPT) — Across the country, temporary school closures are forcing kids into instant distance learning environments for the remainder of the school year. Parents are trying to work their day job while simultaneously educating kids. For most, there isn't ever enough time in a day to handle both. They're stressed, and in the scramble to pick up where teachers left off, the whole family's emotional well-being is taking a hit.

Parents — and kids — could use a break from the pressure of outsized expectations. And, during this time, there are hands-on life lessons we can give kids that build lasting social, physical and cognitive skills. These same lessons can nurture their curiosity, strengthen their ability to problem solve, and give them the tools to push through whatever challenges they face as a learner.

"Every parent is looking for reliable ways to occupy and engage their kids during the day, and we all want our kids to learn and thrive," says Meghan Fitzgerald, co-founder and Chief Learning Officer of Tinkergarten. "Well-designed play experiences provide an ideal way for children to learn a whole range of skills. And, when kids get lost in play, they can maintain joyful focus

and give us the free time we need."

Fitzgerald and her team of educational experts at Tinkergarten, whose curriculum was developed to engage kids' growing minds through fun, play-based activities, offer ideas for parents to foster independent play (imagine long stretches of silence while your kids are busy!) and promote stable mental health at home.

Set up your home for independent play

Learning isn't all worksheets and tests. Research shows children learn best through play, especially in the first 8 years of life. Parents and children also need some time to themselves, especially when sharing close quarters. Independent play can provide that time and, even better, can provide an enriching balance for kids in conjunction with high-quality screen resources such as Khan Academy Kids, Sesame Street and Wide Open School.

Best of all, there are simple, powerful things parents can do using what they already have on hand to inspire independent play. For example, stacking a few blocks in the block area creates the start of a design that children won't be able to resist finishing off. Set up a play tent with household

items inside (spoons, bowls, blankets) and — ta-da! — instant kid camp-out. Or, just start with a bin of water, some measuring cups and lots of time to pretend they are "at the beach." A small corner of the house or yard can inspire a wonderful afternoon of independent play with a bit of strategy and imagination.

Teach what you want them to learn

Most parents are not professional teachers and it is neither fair nor possible to become one overnight. But, shift the goal and realize that some of the most important things to teach children can be extracted from daily life, and these are lessons for which parents are the best teachers. Think about what to do each day and the skills needed to do it. Then invite children to learn in age-appropriate ways.

Cooking, for example, is a marvelous way to connect with kids, activate their senses for learning and sneak in a variety of math concepts as the parents measure. Small children can mix or even just play with their own set of ingredients alongside the parent, while older kids can learn from following a recipe. Choose a passed-down recipe and add a dash of family history in there as well.

Enjoy the outdoors

Even if families can't go to popular parks, they can still enjoy more quiet nature spaces in their own backyard to learn and support their child's (and the parents') well-being. According to a study by the University of Exeter, a total of just two hours per week outside helps adults and children experience the stress-reducing, healing benefits of nature.

Outside not an option right now? Bring the outdoors in. Tinkergarten's simple definition of nature is it's anywhere earth, sky and other living things can be found. No matter the setting, parents can provide

kids with a connection to the outdoors, even while practicing social distancing. Don't underestimate how exciting little changes can be to kids and lean into that. Move the craft table outside, turn on a recording of nature sounds during the day or make a new habit of cuddling on the stoop each evening. Just make it feel special.

Parents can get ideas like this and inspiration from Tinkergarten at Home, a complimentary newsletter that provides parents with a week's worth of DIY activities. The activities are simple, fun, and designed for learning for any age. Plus, parents can access parenting insights that help nav-

igate this challenging stay-at-home time by helping kids learn and grow at home.

Pick something positive each day

Every family is weathering a storm right now, and one person's rainstorm could be another's devastating hurricane. When possible, parents should ask their kids what they're grateful for. Write down each family member's contribution and display it in the kitchen or use sidewalk chalk to design a positive message and artwork for neighbors to see.

Some days will be easier than others. As you are navigating the unknown, every parent deserves a break from the guilt of not being their best self every day. Remember, it's the climate, not the weather in your house that matters in the long run. This storm, too, will pass.



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