

REMOTE LEARNING FOR THE ADHD STUDENT

The Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) learner can have many obstacles in their typical school environment (classroom at school, seated with 20 peers, general education teacher, and possibly resource teachers). Introducing remote learning through a computer screen, while at home, with parents present, and expecting independent initiation, planning, prioritizing, and problem solving (all of which are typically challenging skills for someone with ADHD to start with) is taking that obstacle course to the next level.

For starters, learning and completing your entire school day at home is not the environment students are accustomed to. People, especially children, often associate their "occupations" with their "workplace". Below is what the typical expectation is for completing some of the "occupations" a child might have.

Occupation/Job	Workplace	Coworkers
Student	Classroom at school	Teacher, classmates
Friend	Recess, park	Friends
Baseball player	Outside on baseball field	Coach, teammates
Sleep	Bed	None
Son/daughter	Home	Parents, siblings
Grandchild	Grandparents' home	Grandparents, parents, siblings
Video gamer	In front of tv (loft, living room)	Other gamers, friends

Behavioral expectations are usually different when a child is with parents versus a teacher versus a coach. For instance, when you spend the night at Grandma and Grandpa's most children expect to be able to do things they might not normally be allowed to do at home, or get extra sweets or stay up late. When a child is at their grandparents' while parents are present, there is often more "testing the waters" required to see what extra things might be allowed before parents object. The same confusion occurs when a child is expected to be a student at home with parents present and house rules instead of be a student at school with the teacher present and school rules. For this reason, structure and routine are imperative to successful remote learning for any student, but especially one with ADHD.

Second, learning over a computer screen via Zoom, Facetime, or another live app or prerecorded lesson is exacerbating attention difficulties. In the classroom, the teacher is physically present and able to demonstrate authority, as well as redirect and refocus students. Learning remotely, makes it extremely difficult for the teacher to know if each student is attending and on track. Noises from multiple peers' partitioned screens, along with all the different background noises, and the teacher flipping between screens for instruction and practice can be very extremely distracting and overwhelming to determine what to focus on by distinguishing what's important and what's not.

Finally, when someone is working or learning remotely, success is conditional on being able to access and appropriately apply executive functioning skills. Persons with ADHD often struggle with many executive function such as time management, prioritization and planning, initiation, and problem solving. When someone is working remotely they need to be able to determine what is and is not important, what needs to get done first, how long a task is going to take, what materials and information is needed to complete the task, how to solve a problem they've run across, and what to do, where to go, or whom to ask if they need assistance.

This is where you, the parent, comes in. Listed below are recommendations for what you can do to prepare your child to increase the potential for success with remote learning. These recommendations are meant to help you put your child in the best position to learn by providing the most conducive learning environment to accommodate for the developing or lacking executive functioning skills.

Environment:

1. **Consistency** – Look for a place your child can do their schoolwork (written work, Zoom or Facetime class meetings, and online work - on the Chromebook or computer) every day. This helps your student know where to go every time s/he sits down to start schoolwork and school supplies don't need to be moved around from room to room.
2. **Humdrum** – Choose a workspace that is uninteresting and free of distractions. For many people, but especially someone with ADHD, anything that looks like it might be more fun or easier than what they're supposed to be doing is a distraction. Distractions are a great way to avoid work! Try to keep the workspace in a room away from screens, toys, or anything appealing. Sometimes a bedroom works; however, the bedroom is where you sleep and feel very relaxed. Working in a bedroom is generally not conducive to attention or productivity needed for studying. Keeping the workspace out of a room where others are watching television, playing video games, or conversing is helpful in limiting distractions. Noises, even from uninteresting stimuli (i.e. little brother's cartoon) provides a distraction to avoid work. Someone with ADHD will find themselves watching a show they don't like because it's more interesting than the task in front of them.
3. **Organization** – Keep all necessary school supplies at the work station. This decreases clutter and decreases the amount of time taken away from schoolwork to search for supplies. Pencils, crayons, markers, eraser and pencil sharpeners can be kept in a pencil bag. Notebooks, paper, calculator, and rulers can be kept in a tote beside the worktable/desk. Keep the workspace clean and free of clutter to find items easier and to decrease distractions. If your child has a difficult time returning items to where they belong (most anyone with ADHD does), make a map. No, seriously! Draw a map with locations marked for where items belong and tape it to the side of the desk or the wall in front of the desk, or pin it to a corkboard for quick reminder to clean up and put things away when finished with a project. If your child is not keen on having a map, you can also have labels taped in front of or where items belong. Adults working in offices use labels for files, paperwork, equipment to maintain an organized workspace. Organization provides a fundamental foundation needed for preparation, productivity, and proficiency with any task. Color coding subjects and subject materials also makes it easier to find materials and return them to the original place.

Structure:

1. **Schedule** – Make a schedule and have it accessible for your student to know what the current assignment is, what is coming next, when the next break is, and when schoolwork is finished for the day. By laminating the schedule, you eliminate the need to rewrite the schedule daily and it can easily be hung or placed in a binder. When the schedule is laminated, it also allows for your student to use a dry-erase marker to cross off each completed activity to show progress for the day and make it visually easier to scan for the next listed item. (*Life Hack – Instead of laminating the schedule, write it on a piece of paper and slip it inside the clear, front binder cover. If the schedule changes, you can pull it out of the cover, erase and modify as needed, then return to the binder cover. Your student can also use a dry-erase marker to cross off each completed activity.)
2. **Breaks** – Mental and Movement breaks should be planned throughout the remote learning schedule. Recess, P.E., Art, Music, Lunch, Library, and other specials provide educational instruction outside of the



core classes. They also provide physical activity to reenergize the body and time away from challenging schoolwork to regain mental composure. This respite time is necessary for anyone to be able to focus, problem solve, plan, and perform any challenging activities. Breaks should be semi-structured to provide clear expectations of duration, options for appropriate activities, and acceptable conduct or rules.

4. **Agenda** – Most schools provide an agenda (either paper notebook or through something like Google Classroom) for students to list homework assigned for that day. For a student with ADHD, writing each homework assignment down is key; however, a simple note of the subject and main idea for homework (i.e. Math pgs. 48–50) is likely not enough to ensure successful completion of the assignment. Persons with ADHD often overlook details and assume they will be remembered; however, this crucial key to success is often where the breakdown occurs.

Essential Elements of an Effective Agenda:

- > Subject Title
- > Due Date
- > Specific Requirements (i.e. page numbers, problem numbers such as evens only or 1–5 and 14–20 only)
- > Extra Requirements (i.e. have a bibliography or reference page for a report, extra credit available)
- > Necessary materials needed to complete the assignment (i.e. textbook, journal, referencing webpages, Google Classroom, or other special items not necessarily kept at the home workspace, such as a special calculator)

Example Agenda

Date: 04/06 (Mon.)		
Math	Pg.14,15 (Evens only) EC-pg. 16 #1-5 due Friday	Textbook, calc.
Literacy	Read pg. 61-73 Answer Ch. ?'s on pg. 74 due tomorrow	Textbook
Science	Find 2 articles online re: Types of Trees (age, environment, height) – print articles and resource	Online articles
History	Study Ch. 3 & 4 for quiz on Friday (EC-complete study guide)	Study guide, textbook notes

*Extra tip: Color code each subject in the agenda. Use a matching colored book cover on the textbook. Place all subject work in matching colored folders to find, retrieve, and store worksheets and notes at the end of the subject period. Designate and label one side for all assignments, notes, and graded work. The other side of the folder will be designated and labeled for all completed homework needing to be handed in. By using specific colors for each subject and all of the related materials, it's like you're putting a tab label on a file for easier and faster retrieval when you need to pull the file out of the filing cabinet.

With remote learning being provided, most assignments will also be listed in Google Classroom or on a website the teacher has set up. Having your student write down what work needs to be completed and when it's due is not only recommended, but extremely beneficial. When looking at something on a page, it's easy to gloss over words, miss key points, and misunderstand statements. By writing down assignments, writing out notes, or highlighting key information you're providing yourself with muscle memory and a visual picture to "file away" for easier retrieval and recollection at a later time.

