

Guide for Parents & Caregivers of School-Aged Children During COVID-19



Table of Contents

Strategies for Managing Work, Learning and Parenting	2
In-person Learning Support	3
Support for Remote Learning at Home	4
Support for Remote Learning Outside of Home.....	5
Talking to Your Child about School during COVID-19	6
Taking Care of Yourself.....	7

This guide was developed in conjunction with content provided by our partners Magellan Health and LifeCare. This information is for resource and support purposes only. Please refer to your child's school website/administration for their specific COVID-19 protocols.

For Additional Parenting Resources Visit:

From work: The Hub>Baystate Healthy>Parenting and Pregnancy

From home: baystatehealth.org/employees/baystate-healthy/parenting-and-pregnancy

To speak with someone directly about your unique challenges, email BaystateHealthy@baystatehealth.org

Baystate Health *y*

Strategies for Managing Work, Learning and Parenting

As a result of the pandemic, many parents are coping with working their regular jobs, while also helping their child(ren) with their daily schoolwork, as well as fulfilling the regular caregiving duties of parenthood. This new “triple threat” of working, teaching and parenting is creating a tremendous amount of daily stress for many people. Here are a few strategies to help you mitigate these challenges:

Be Involved in your child’s learning - How involved you need to be will depend on the age and maturity/motivation of your child(ren), as well as whether they are learning remotely or in-person.

- Older, motivated children may need (and prefer) minimal involvement, for example one daily check-in on what they did that day, whether all assignments/homework have been completed, whether there are any issues/concerns and whether there are any updates from the school or teacher.
- Somewhat younger kids and kids who are less motivated may need to have several check-ins each day.
- Younger kids and kids who struggle with motivation/attention may require more constant/consistent supervision. In addition to regular check-ins during the day (if at home with you), have them show you their assignments at the end of each day to check for completion or see where they may need more help.

Assign child-related responsibilities - Talk with your partner and determine specific times during which each parent will handle some or all child-related responsibilities and which ones. Put that person’s name into a schedule so kids know who they should come to with questions or issues. This can be a huge benefit to your productivity, stress level and relationship. This arrangement is particularly helpful if you and your partner are both working from home, while your child(ren) are home during the school day as well.

Keep communicating– Check-in regularly with your manager, your partner and your children. Have a candid conversation with your boss and make sure you are clear about your challenges and what you need in order to be successful at work. Have a discussion with your partner about what each of you needs, expects and can provide regarding work, caregiving, learning support and personal needs. Talk with children about what they need and what you need. Establish some guidelines, for example times you should not be interrupted, how they should get your attention, etc.

Have a Backup Plan - Parents may need to use outside resources, caregivers, screen-time and other activities as a way to create blocks of time to complete necessary tasks especially during times when both parents need to focus on work. Have a backup plan for when your child finishes schoolwork early or gets stuck on an assignment and you and your partner both need to focus uninterrupted. Decide in advance what resources are available and how you will implement their use.

Seek Support When Needed - Remember that these are unprecedented times and support is available. If you need to speak to someone about your challenges your WorkLife and EAP Support program is available 24/7 at no cost to you. When you call the confidential, phone number (800-888-6332) you will speak directly to a master’s level clinician who can connect you with a local counselor for emotional health support, a worklife specialist for resource and referral support, or a variety of other resources.

In-person Learning Support

In-Person Learning

If your child is attending school in-person at least one day a week, here are some things to consider to make the experience at school a safe and successful one.

Get, and Stay, Informed – Understand that typical school options may be limited or unavailable for safety reasons. Explain to your child that these limitations (such as limited/no recess, eating lunch in your classroom – are likely not going to be permanent changes, but for the time being, these limitations are put into place to keep everyone safe.

Know your school(s) plan for learning, transportation, meals, safety/hygiene, and health monitoring protocols. If you don't know where to find this information, don't be afraid to call or email the school to get a copy of these plans sent to you.

Maintain communication - Make sure you are in communication with the school district, school(s), teachers, and any other information sources to ensure you have the most current and complete information on plans, requirements and changes and are quickly and easily reachable if needed.

Have a backup plan - Be prepared if another outbreak necessitates closure of your school and a move to online/remote learning. Decide now what you might do; would you be able to stay home with your child, have family/friends stay with your child, hire a babysitter, send them to a center-based or in-home child care program? If you need help securing child care, contact a Worklife specialist who can help you locate community resources to support your needs. Call your confidential WorkLife and EAP Support program 24/7 at 800-888-6332 and ask to speak with a "WorkLife Parenting Specialist."

Reinforce Good Hygiene Habits

Remind your children regularly about the proper protections and safeties measure in place to protect themselves and those around them.

Social Distancing: Remind children to maintain social distancing requirements when outside of the home.

Hand Hygiene: Encourage children to wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the restroom, after getting home from school/activities, before and after preparing or handling food, after using shared equipment and especially after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing.

Masks/Face Coverings: Make sure they have plenty of masks and that they fit properly.

Home health monitoring: Conduct symptom checks before your child(ren) leaves for school every day.

Children should stay home if they're not feeling well or have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Support for Remote Learning At Home

Remote Learning at Home

As schools are faced with the challenge of providing distance learning experiences for students during the pandemic, parents are more involved in their child(ren)'s schoolwork than ever before. If your child is conducting their school days at home right now, there are several things you can do to help your child (and yourself) maintain healthy learning and living habits.



Have a Routine - Routine create a feeling of security and sets expectations for both children and adults. Try to keep daily life as normal as possible and follow regular routines such as bed time, learning time, chores, family meals, active time and time with friends.

Develop a Daily Schedule for your Children - In addition to learning time and other appointments, a daily schedule for your child should include some kind of physical activity every day and regular breaks. Younger children especially have short attention spans and need more frequent breaks. If possible, try to mimic the breaks they have at school. Be sure to also build in social time during the day so that your child(ren) can stay connected with friends and family.

Carve Out Space(s) - It is important that everyone have a place to work effectively and comfortably. Having dedicated spaces where individual family members know they are expected to work or learn and have what they need to do so encourages focus and increases productivity. Dedicated spaces also minimize distractions and interruptions.

- Younger children or older children who need some extra supervision may benefit from a space that is shared with, or near to, a parent's workspace or a place that parents' visit frequently.
- Older children may do best with individual dedicated space so that they can stream online classes and study without disruption.
- If you are working remotely while your children are learning at home, you too will need dedicated space that offers privacy and quiet for meetings, calls and times when you need to focus on work tasks uninterrupted.
- It may be challenging to carve out individual spaces in some homes, you may need to be creative. Consider repurposing unused or infrequently used spaces.

Set Tech Boundaries - It is important to maintain boundaries around tech use so it doesn't become a problem. Strongly consider banning cellphones in learning areas during learning times. Cellphones are a major source of distraction. If you haven't already, install parental controls on your kids web access.

Support for Remote Learning Outside of Home

Remote Learning Outside of the Home

Many child care providers and community-based organizations have opened their doors to our remote learners, so that they have a place to go to learn safely during the school day, while schools are closed to in-person learning. In general, these facilities are equipped with high speed wireless internet connection, licensed providers and teachers to support your child(ren) during their remote learning days, and most importantly a safe and comfortable space conducive to learning.

Various programs within our community are offering these services, such as:

- Square One (see additional information in the far right column)
- YMCA
- Boys & Girls Club
- Community-based “out-of-school-time” programs – i.e MLK Center, Springfield Partners for Community Action
- Family Daycare Providers
- Community-based childcare providers for younger children

Eligibility: These programs are typically available for children ages 6-12 who are enrolled in school and not able to attend in-person. Some programs may limit eligibility to students enrolled in certain school districts.

Hours of Operation: Each program/provider sets their own hours of operation. These programs are available either on a part-time or full-time basis. If you work nontraditional hours, many family-based care providers typically offer extended/non-business hours of operation.

Cost: These programs charge fees comparable to other center-based and/or family-care programs. Some programs offer financial assistance and/or accept vouchers. If costs are prohibitive for you, please contact Baystate Healthy at BaystateHealthy@baystatehealth.org for additional support.

Locate a Remote Learning Program Near You

Contact WorkLife and EAP Support at 800-888-6332 and ask to speak to a “WorkLife Parenting Specialist”. Your specialist can help locate providers in your community who have availability for your school-aged child(ren).



Availability at Square One

Our trusted community partner and elite provider of child care and family services; Square One is offering remote learning programs at their Center-based child care facilities in Springfield, MA as well as through their family care providers located throughout Springfield, Chicopee, Indian Orchard and Ludlow.

For information about Square One’s services and current openings, call their Enrollment Team at 413-732-5183

Talking to Your Child About School During COVID-19

School can be stressful at the best of times, but the challenges and changes in how school is operating due to the pandemic is adding significant stress to students, parents and teachers. Some children may be nervous or reluctant to go to school, especially if they have been learning at home for months. Consider these talking points, for students of all ages, to help them navigate some of the feelings they are having about school this year.

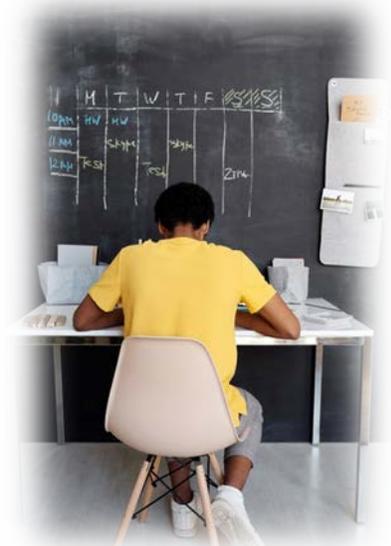
- Have an open conversation with your child about what concerns they have about school. Actively listen to what your child has to say.
- Focus on the positives of school; for example that your child is able to be with friends and teachers (if physically in the classroom) or see them online (if remote).
- Share information so your child knows what to expect. Cover the important points but don't overwhelm your child with details.
- Reassure your child that their school is putting safety measures in place to keep students and teachers healthy and be sure to reinforce healthy habits at home.

Watch for behavior changes in your child that may indicate he or she is having difficulties coping. Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way.

Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens.
- Poor school performance or avoiding school.
- Difficulties with attention and concentration.
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

If these behaviors persist and/or disrupt your child's daily routine, it may indicate that your child is having difficulty coping and support from a mental health professional may be the best next step.



Child Therapy through WorkLife and EAP Support

If you have a child who is struggling in any way and they are open to speaking with someone, a therapist will be able to tailor the therapy to their unique needs and the issues at hand. All Baystate Health employees and their dependents/household members, have access to up to 6 sessions per issue, per year with a counselor, at no-cost. Appointments are available in person, via live video and/or phone, and even via text messaging (age 13+). This benefit is available through the WorkLife and EAP Support program. Call 800-888-6332 to speak with a clinician who can help get your child scheduled to meet with a therapist.

Taking Care of Yourself During this Time

It is important to acknowledge the challenges you are experiencing right now. Give yourself permission to make mistakes, accept that things are not going to run completely smoothly and you may not be 100% productive every single day. Try different strategies as many times as you need until you find a combination of ones that work.

Manage Your Stress - While everyone experiences stress in their own unique way, there are some common symptoms. Recognizing your own personal signs of excessive stress is the first step to managing it. Begin by asking yourself the following questions:

- Do I often feel out of control?
- Do I feel constant pressure to achieve?
- Do I have difficulty concentrating?
- Do I have feelings of depression, helplessness, anxiety or panic?
- Do I have difficulty falling asleep or do I wake frequently during the night?
- Do I suffer from frequent headaches?
- Have I experienced a significant loss of or increase in appetite?
- Do I feel unusually tired?
- Do I cry (or feel the desire to cry) often?
- Do I feel faint or dizzy for no apparent reason?
- Do I experience frequent nausea?
- Do I experience shortness of breath or feel tightness in my chest without exertion?
- Do I regularly feel the need to smoke or have a drink to relax?

If you consistently answer “yes” to even one of these questions, your body may be sending you signals that you are stressed.



Support for your Mental Health is Available When You Need It

Self-Guided Emotional and Mental Well-being Resources- [meQuilibrium](#), [FearFighter](#), [MoodCalmer](#) etc.

Support from a Licensed “Listener”- [through WorkLife and EAP Support](#) - 1-800-888-6332

It’s easier to work through anxiety, sadness, anger and other emotions when you talk things through with a licensed expert. Through WorkLife and EAP Support, you and your household members can choose to meet with a counselor, in-person, virtually by phone or web and even via text therapy (age minimums apply). Up to 6 no-cost sessions per issue, per year, per household member is available.

Immediate support is also available if your stress level becomes overwhelming. This service is completely confidential and available 24/7/365. Call 800-888-6332.