

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Now that most of our children are starting the school year in remote or virtual mode, how do we set up a good home learning environment for our children? Catherine Pearson writes that last spring, when 55 million U.S. students were flung into remote learning, everybody did the best that they could to teach their children virtually. Teachers led Zoom calls, and the kids were just plopped down wherever there was some relatively quiet space was available for them. If your child is learning from home at the beginning of this school year, let's do things differently this year.

Research by Sapna Cheryan, Sianna A. Ziegler, Victoria C. Plaut, and Andrew N. Meltzoff shows how the learning environment influences student achievement. Parents need to be more intentional in how they set up the learning environment to help their children learn at high levels. Be determined that your child will have the best learning environment to maximize their level of achievement.

I found tips 1a-1j for setting up an effective home learning environment from Dr. Lisa Clifford, Associate Professor of Pediatrics Behavioral Medicine & Clinical Psychology Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. I borrowed tips 2-6 from Catherine Pearson. Follow the tips below to help start the school year off right for your child.

- 1. Creating an effective learning environment.** If your child has Attention Deficit Disorder/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Dr. Lisa Clifford recommends the following steps be taken to maximize your child's learning and learning environment:
 - a) Establish and maintain routines and a daily schedule.
 - b) Establish behavioral expectations for your child, focusing on what you would like to see them do rather focusing on negative behavior (e.g., works quietly for a designated amount of time with 1 or fewer reminders, raise hand when help is needed, transitions to a less preferred task calmly with 1 or fewer reminders). Provide feedback throughout the day to your child on they are doing with sticking to the rules and problem-solve any barriers to following rules when needed. Providing rewards for following rules is a great way to keep them motivated and interested (e.g., earn screen-time or outside playtime, special snack, etc. for following rules 75% of the time).
 - c) Provide visual reminders of routines, schedules, and rules.
 - d) Use specific positive reinforcement to your child for following rules and routines.
 - e) Minimize distractions. Find a quiet place in the house to put your child's desk or workspace. Turn-off televisions remove cell phones and other electronics.

Playing white noise can help to drown out environmental variations in noise that can be distracting.

- f) Develop a break schedule for your learner (water breaks, snack breaks, bathroom breaks, physical activity breaks, stretches, yoga, jumping jacks, sensory breaks, etc.).
- g) Apply what your child is learning to real world situations to give context to what they are learning and to make learning more meaningful.
- h) Help your child to break down larger assignments/projects into smaller more feasible tasks and help them outline the steps they will need to take to complete the assignment/projects.
- i) Check-in with your child to make sure they are following along with the lesson and are beginning the assignment appropriately (e.g., have read and understand the instructions, identified the first step and know how to complete the step).
- j) Use visual timers to help your child stay on track.

2. **A designated space.** A designated space says that this is where school and learning happen. It is a different place from where kids sleep or play video games or watch TV. When your child wants to play or goof off a little bit, or take a break, they leave that space. The more the designated space is associated with school and learning, the better.
3. **Get your child's screen set-up right.** Your own experience tells you that staring down at a laptop for a few hours can and will result in neck pain. The screen should be just about at eye level and between 20 to 30 inches from your child's face.
4. **Make sure their feet hit the floor.** Start with making sure that your child has a comfortable chair in which to sit. Having their feet on the floor allows your child to feel grounded and ready to learn. It might be worth considering a sit-to-stand desk that allows your child to change postures throughout the day.
5. **Provide a space for learning materials.** Most kids and teenagers with ADHD generate disorganization. Clutter in a learning area ramps up the anxiety in some people. Children need a space where they can keep their school stuff — their devices, books, workbooks, etc.
6. **Reduce distractions.** Start out by asking your child what was distracting to them last year when they did remote learning. Then, take action to ensure that distractions are kept to a minimum. Another tip for reducing distraction is to make sure that your learner has their own desk with their own chair, in an area of the house where they will not be distracted by extraneous noise, and disruptions by family pets and siblings. A final tip for reducing distractions is to create quiet signs that either the

parent or child can hold up to let everyone know when you are on a learning call or need to focus.

- 7. Give ownership of the learning area to your child.** When students have ownership over their learning space, they tend to have more buy-in to the learning process. Allow them to decide how to decorate, within reason, their learning space. This is their space and nobody else's. This little tip will generate a lot of excitement for learning in your learner. When there's excitement about learning, behavior challenges seem to disappear.
- 8. Clean Space.** No matter where you plan to have your student do the bulk of his or her work at home, it must be clean. This almost immediately rules out the student's bedroom, which is just fine since you do not want them working in there by themselves anyway (more on that in a moment). If it is the dining room table, it cannot have anything else on it. If it is the living room floor there should be no toys, clothes, etc. Why? because cluttered space means a cluttered mind and there are just too many fun distractions lying around.
- 9. Avoid the Bedroom.** Allowing a student to do work in their bedroom is a mistake. First, too many fun distractions. Second, that bed can be too comfortable. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it can make the student's personal space the place they take stressful activity. Every student gets stressed over schoolwork at some point and taking the stress to their personal/private area does not allow for a "safe zone" at home where they can escape.

Kay Carter reminds us that even though you have designed the perfect space for your child to learn remotely, even the most well-designed space cannot be a substitute for managing sleep, time, and stress. Ensure your child gets a good night's sleep, drinks plenty of water, and keeps their stress levels down. These tips along with an effective learning environment at home will set your child up for success. Let's learn from the experiences of last year's remote learning experience and make this a great start of the school year for your child.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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