

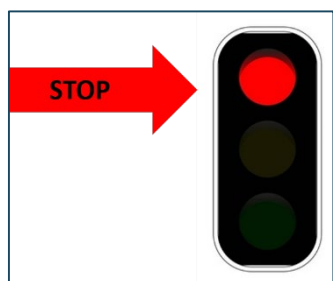
Back to School During COVID-19

Proactive Expectations and Communication

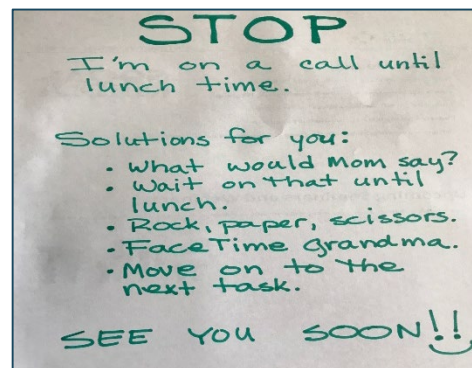
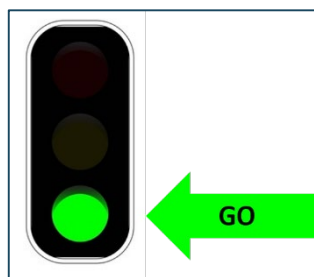
Finding a balance between working and parenting can be challenging. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that challenge has dramatically increased as many families are now working from home while also supporting their child's remote learning. Here are some strategies to help ease the stress:

Communicate Your Expectations to Your Child

- ▶ **Develop a clear plan.** It's essential to spend time proactively creating and communicating your expectations to your child up front. Depending on age and ability, your child might need a little support—or more than a little. Be flexible. Revisit your plans for combining work plus school after a few days and adjust them if necessary.
- ▶ **Discuss your schedule.** Talk with your child about specific times in the day when you will not be available. Come up with a plan for what children can do if they have a problem or need help. If they are stuck on a school assignment, for example, they can move on to another task, read a book, or ask an older sibling for help while they wait for your assistance.
 - ▶ **For younger children, consider using a red light, green light visual cue.** When Mom has the stoplight picture out with the arrow pointing to the red light, it means she shouldn't be interrupted except for emergencies until the arrow points to the green light. For older children, a sticky note with options serves as a good reminder to keep them on task (see below).
 - ▶ **Have a specific conversation with your child about what constitutes an emergency.** There is a huge difference between losing the red marker cap and losing the family dog. Discuss different scenarios so your child is clear about what qualifies as an emergency and requires interrupting you no matter what.
 - ▶ **Discuss the choices for what your child can do once they have finished their work.** If screen time is an option, decide on realistic time limits and set pre-determined boundaries for acceptable use.



Cue for younger children



Cue for older children

Set Your Child Up For Success

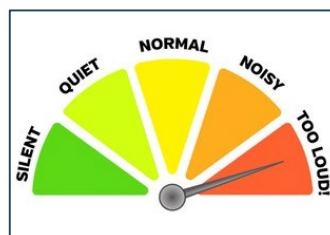
- ▶ Make sure your child has the resources they need to stay productive by doing a bit of prep up front:
 - ▶ **Do a tech check together.** Ensure your child knows how to find and utilize the technology and links needed to complete their assignments. Practice together so they can do it independently.
 - ▶ **Simplify tech use.** Keep a centralized log book with user names and passwords for school sites they need to access. Remind them they can refer to this as often as needed.
 - ▶ **Get organized.** Put together a bin of school supplies so there are extra materials handy when needed.

Encourage Independence

- ▶ **Encourage age-appropriate independence.** Set up a lunch-making station and encourage children to make their own lunch or snack occasionally. Stock a box in the pantry with less-perishable food items such as bread, crackers, and dried fruit. Stock a similar box in the fridge with fruit, cut veggies, yogurt, hummus, cheese sticks, or deli meat. Make a sign that lists the elements of a healthy lunch, e.g., one grain, one protein, one fruit, and one vegetable, so children can easily gather their own lunch items from the boxes.
- ▶ **Develop a plan to keep the household running smoothly.** With everyone home, messes grow quickly. Teach children to independently put things away and tidy up their work space when they're done. Build a few quick cleaning times into your daily routine, such as a "10-minute tidy" before or after meals.

Be Prepared

- ▶ Great teachers have all sorts of magic tricks up their sleeves for those times when things don't go exactly as planned in the classroom. You should have some parental magic as well.
 - ▶ **Gather some engaging materials.** Spend a little time putting together a few boxes of items that will engage and interest your child. Include child-safe items for them to explore. Maybe it's a prop box of items related to camping to spark an imaginary adventure, or perhaps it's a new puzzle, or open-ended materials with vivid colors that invite creativity.
 - ▶ **Make visual reminders.** Create a noise meter so children can visually see when it's an appropriate time for noisy activities, and when it's time for quiet voices, such as when Dad is on a conference call.



- ▶ **Set up a calming corner with soft blankets or pillows.** When your child is feeling frustrated, tired, or overwhelmed, they can take a little time to regroup.
- ▶ **Remember that it's completely ok for your child to be bored occasionally.** Boredom motivates children to engage in beneficial creative and imaginative play that wouldn't happen otherwise, so don't feel pressured to fill every second of their day.

Have Patience and Keep Adjusting

- ▶ **Be patient with yourself and your children.** You're going to have hard days. When frustration builds, pause momentarily and do something fun. Turn on some music, enjoy a book, or do some physical activity together. Expect some conflict as you become accustomed to being home together more. Talk with children about conflict resolution and encourage them to take breaks.
- ▶ **Remember that relationships are always your first priority.** More than ever, children need reassurance and comfort. What works in a school setting doesn't always work at home. Sprinkle in moments of talking, playing, or reading with children to remind them that while your days may look different, your enjoyment of the time spent together remains the same.