



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

How to Coach Parents Who Are Teaching at Home

Many parents and guardians felt overwhelmed in supporting their student’s learning during the pandemic—these strategies can help.

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“My children do the work in 15 minutes and then ask, ‘What’s next?’” one parent recently said in reference to schooling at home during the pandemic. “I don’t need more work for them; what I need is help designing lessons for them to keep learning.”

Covid-19 affected schools that had to adjust in unanticipated ways. Teachers at my school felt pressure to keep students learning at the same pace as before, yet they knew that they could not teach or assess in the same way. When they gave assignments, it was difficult to know if the students were doing the work or just going through the motions. Some teachers sent detailed daily schedules, while others sent lists of assignments.

In order to customize learning for their children, parents and guardians need learning objectives and ways to achieve those goals. Teachers can be the partners that families need by providing them information and tools to assess student progress.

GIVE THE SCOPE

Define for parents or guardians the big picture or the scope of what needs to be learned this year. One parent said she feels like she is flying blind, not knowing if her children are learning what they need to learn. Explaining the full scope of the curriculum can help families better prepare for individual lessons.

Teachers understand how some content is best taught in progression, and they know the ways to lay foundations of understanding before moving to the next objective. Conveying that process to families can guide their work. For example, in fourth grade, students learn to master multiplication of several digits. Begin by pointing families to resources to learn the mechanics of multiplication. Then introduce

ways they can use the new skills in real life. If parents and guardians know the progression of the learning goals, it is easier to guide their children in that direction through multi-digit math experiences in the store or at the farmer's market. When parents know the scope of what their child needs to learn, they understand the purpose behind the learning activities and can take advantage of real-world applications.

COMMUNICATE LEARNING GOALS

Parents and guardians need the "I can" statements that define learning goals. If parents know the goal, they can find alternative learning opportunities to get to that end, and they can evaluate if their child actually can do it when they are done.

Explain the importance of setting clear learning targets to parents or guardians. Encourage them to frame goals with an "I can..." sentence stem format. Make sure the goals are specific and measurable. For example, instead of "I can understand equivalent fractions," students write, "I can find four equivalent fractions for $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{7}{16}$." Having specific outcomes in mind can help families develop lessons that serve the learning goals. In addition, clear and measurable goals will make assessment easier for parents and guardians.

Parents and guardians can share the end objectives with students as well. Research shows that students benefit from knowing the goal of the learning.

PROVIDE RESOURCES

Once parents or guardians have the scope and goals, they need the tools to deepen and extend learning. Rather than providing a list of online activities or assignment options, begin by assessing parents' needs. My most successful teachers found that taking the time to call, video chat, or message parents about what they need is critical. Discuss the student's progress and any challenges they are facing. Once those needs are identified, it is easier for teachers to provide tailored resources for the family.

Offering resources doesn't require explaining the pedagogy behind each tool. While some parents or guardians may not know about project-based learning or collaborative teams, they may benefit from implementing resources based on those principles. Some of the teachers in my school found that sharing fun learning activities based on these ideas, even if they did not share a full explanation of the process, was successful.

ENCOURAGE FLEXIBILITY

Parents and guardians want the flexibility to alter assignments to meet the needs of their family and individual students. One parent with multiple school-aged children told the teacher, "Sorry if I don't get all of your assignments done. We decided to learn together rather than individually."

Not everyone in the family must, or can, do the same thing to learn. A fourth-grade teacher at my school requested that the family go on nature walks. Her student was asked to keep a notebook of the plants and animals observed and write a paragraph for each entry. The other children in the family could draw or take pictures of what they found. After they returned, they shared what was unique about what they found. Flexibility in assignments allows families to learn together.

Distance learning also means that some parents may struggle, and teachers have to be prepared with alternative plans to help them find success. When parents encounter difficulties in getting students to focus, a teacher can offer to do video lessons with the students. An intervention by a teacher, even temporarily, can help get a student back on track.

Teachers and schools are making all sorts of accommodations for learning at home. To help families succeed, teachers can provide clear communication, the big picture of what the student needs to learn, and the necessary support for the parents and guardians to succeed.

Source: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-coach-parents-who-are-teaching-home>