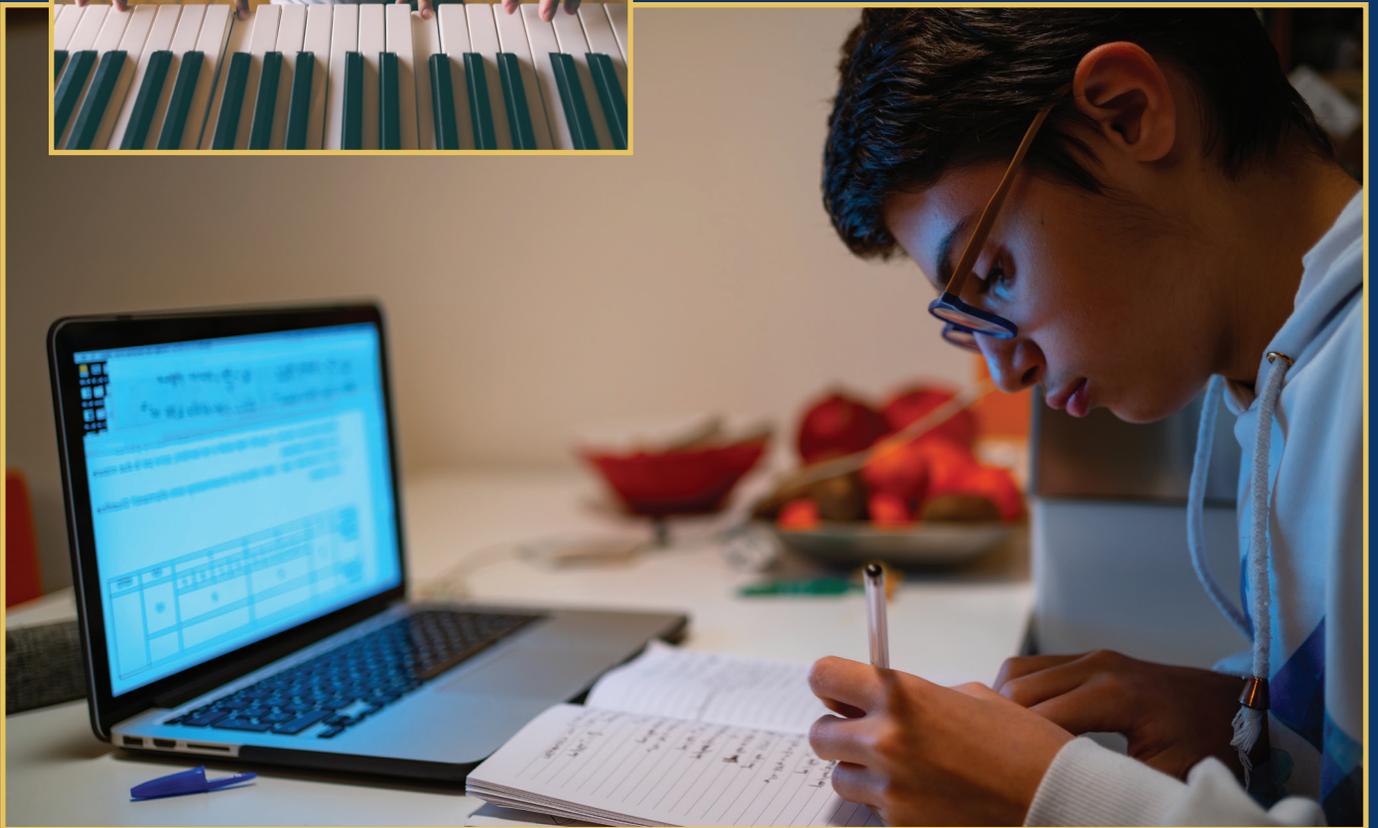


KEEP UP

# ACADEMIC SKILLS

DURING THIS  
CHALLENGING TIME

by Cheryl Gedzelman



**Z**ACH SAT AT HIS DESK with a math worksheet in front of him. He put his head down on the desk. He drew a rocket. Then he got up to get a snack. His mother, Jane, muted herself from her Zoom meeting. “Zach, that is the third time you got up in the last ten minutes. Why can’t you just complete that worksheet?”

There are many reasons that Zach could not complete the worksheet. First, he didn’t like the desk that his mom carefully set up for his homebound education. Second, he was tired of doing the same type of math problems over and over. Third, he had a question about one of the problems, but both his parents were at virtual meetings. Fourth, he felt antsy and it was so hard to stay in his seat. When his mom got more involved in her meeting, he grabbed his phone and opened a game.

In the best of times, homeschooling is a challenge. For parents who never planned to homeschool and are very busy with their own jobs, the challenge is significant. In particular, children with ADHD have difficulty sustaining attention to tasks they find difficult or boring.

## Strategies for success

For this article, I interviewed one new and several seasoned homeschooling families about their experiences. I discovered that many parents have been successful in providing the structure and stimulation their children need in various ways. In some cases, their children blossom from daily routines that meet their temperaments better than a school setting. For children with and without ADHD, the following strategies have worked:

### ● Structure

Do you get more accomplished with a to-do list or schedule, or with a flexible day? I always say, if it’s not on my calendar, it probably won’t happen. For your kids, it is most important to have a schedule, which you can plan together the night before. This should include a wake-up time and bedtime. Be sure to include reading for pleasure for children of any age. *Everyone should have a Kindle app.* Some children may prefer an audiobook, which they can even listen to while walking. You can also include puzzle time and drawing.

### ● Flexibility

When I asked families what they like best about homeschooling, the answer was most often flexibility. This works in many ways. Your child can do the most challenging tasks when he is at his best, be it morning or afternoon. (For some college students I know, it’s the middle of the night, but that is another story). Also, you can schedule therapy sessions at convenient times. Most importantly, you can alter and enhance the curriculum to meet your child’s strengths.

### ● Checklist for task completion

A significant challenge for many parents is doing their own work without being interrupted while their children are productive as

well. This is where a checklist comes in handy. I interviewed Joan about her schedule when homeschooling her sixth-grade son. She said he loved to read, so they did independent reading first. He hated math, so they did math ten minutes at a time, with a movement break. If she was busy, he could do these tasks on his own and check them off when completed. If he had a question about a math problem, he could highlight it and ask her when she was available.

### ● Reward systems

Marcy is homeschooling her active second-grader while teleworking. Since he regularly craves attention, I asked her how she gets him to work independently. She said it’s all in the rewards chart. If he completes five of his tasks for the day, he gets a small reward from the reward basket at the end of the day.

## Approaches that work

Many unexpected situations have a silver lining. Your home school may be better for your child’s personality than the classroom. Here are some approaches that work.

### ● Exercise and take movement breaks throughout the day.

Sheryl has been homeschooling her daughter June for two years. I asked them about their daily schedule. It includes exercise first, including pullups, pushups, situps, and the balance board. June has more exercise breaks during the day, including a walk or bike ride and stretch breaks. Research has shown that exercise helps people focus, learn, and retain information. Some children learn better while moving. Sheryl quizzes June during their walks. I played multiplication basketball with a third-grade student during breaks. Kathy Kuhl, a homeschooling expert who blogs on her website [learndifferently.com](http://learndifferently.com), says that multisensory instruction works by addressing different parts of the brain. She suggests that children jump on a mini-trampoline or with a jump rope, or throw a nerf ball around the home while doing memory work and review, such as math facts.

### ● Take the time for a nutritious breakfast and lunch.

June listens to educational podcasts during some meals.

### ● Vary schoolwork locations.

Recent research has shown that varying locations for learning is more effective than sitting in the same seat all the time. This can include the dining room, the couch, the deck, or the trampoline (but not the bed, which should be just for sleeping).

- **Delve deeper into areas of interest.**

Recent thinking by experts is that ADHD is not a deficit of attention but difficulty paying attention to uninteresting things and strength in paying attention and being passionate about other things. While working at home, your children have the opportunity to delve deeper into areas of interest, tapping into their strengths and passions. This can include all kinds of research, including books, articles, interviews, YouTube, and documentaries. Our public libraries have many resources online. Joan's son Kevin was very interested in mapping, so they spent a lot of time on that. Now he is a senior in high school and applying to architecture programs. Kathy Kuhl worked with a family whose child was so traumatized that he could only focus on anime. That year, he learned about Japanese history and language, and drawing.

- **Assign projects to reflect your child's strengths.**

While a teacher at school may require an essay, at home children can present their projects in many ways, including Google slides, a skit, a song, a presentation on YouTube, and an art project. June writes book and movie reviews, which she publishes on Amazon. Kuhl suggests collages, sculptures, and public speaking. To make these projects more manageable, she recommends dividing large projects into smaller ones.

- **Do experiments.**

There are many resources for doing science experiments at home, including step-by-step instructions on YouTube. You can also make up your own. Kevin's favorite experiment was to calculate rates by measuring how long it took their guinea pig to run across the patio. Kuhl suggests science activities for children stuck in an apartment—measure water in a bathtub, do a nature study from your window, and grow plants from seeds.

- **Use online games and educational apps.**

There are so many valuable educational games and apps that can enhance your child's learning in a fun way. These are great activities for when you don't have time for personalized instruction. To find the best ones, check reviews and ask your friends. Many people use the non-profit Khan Academy, which has stepped up to offer daily schedules and extensive material for all subjects on their website.

- **Explore videos and documentaries.**

Several parents told me that documentaries have been a great resource. Sheryl said they have used National Geographic and PBS, and also watched *The Right Stuff* and *Apollo 13*.

- **Remediate weak areas.**

This when a parent should plan to be available to help.

## Silver linings

I asked students what they liked best about homeschooling. June immediately said the flexibility. Joan said that during the one semester he was homeschooled, Kevin's attitude toward school improved, he calmed down, and matured.

I asked them their advice for people new to homeschooling. June, now in sixth grade, said to be committed, do things you will actually learn from, take five-minute exercise breaks every thirty minutes, and do hands-on activities. Joan advised parents to relax, encourage reading, not to overload, and to give yourself a break. Kuhl suggested attending to all family members' emotional needs and taking the time to listen to each other and help friends and neighbors.

Although summer is coming, this is hardly our typical summer. Most summers, students take a break and lose academic skills, which teachers review in September. This summer, we will have to make up for the spring disruption with a summer catch-up. Summer will be a time to continue learning, even if at a more relaxed pace.

One of the most challenging but promising parts of being at home together is the opportunity to improve family relationships. Families can schedule regular activities together, such as hikes, games, and reading time. Parents can be available for when their children and teens get the urge to “really” talk. Most of us have more downtime now to explore our relationships, our interests, and our passions. Let's make the most of this unique situation. **A**

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**Cheryl Gedzelman** is the president of *Tutoring for Success*, a northern Virginia-based company that offers one-to-one tutoring, test preparation, and academic coaching in person or remotely. She also serves on the boards of the ADHD Resource Group of Northern Virginia and CHADD of Northern Virginia and Washington, DC. She has an MA in curriculum and teaching from Columbia University. Learn more at [www.TutoringForSuccess.com](http://www.TutoringForSuccess.com).

