

HOME office | school

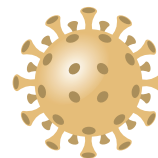
How Do You Work from Home and Help Kids Navigate Remote Learning?

by Carey A. Heller, PsyD

MANY PEOPLE found themselves working from home unexpectedly as the COVID-19 pandemic spread. Those with school-aged children also found themselves having to help their kids with remote learning. For many individuals, adjusting to remote work and having their children attend school from home is a big adjustment in and of itself. For adults with ADHD, however, this new situation heightens many of the core challenges they already face.

Adults with ADHD frequently have trouble adjusting to changes, creating and following a structured schedule, staying focused, organized, and on task. In addition, difficulties with planning, time management, and other similar items are common. Working remotely often requires people to have increased self-discipline to get themselves to sit down and do work, remain focused, and be organized without the external structure offered by an office setting.

Assisting children with remote learning entails helping them organize a plan for keeping track of assignments, figuring out when they need to attend live classes, getting on those video sessions at the right time, staying focused, and avoiding distractions. For parents who have ADHD, these tasks are likely difficult to do for themselves, so having to help their children manage them can be especially taxing. The combination they now face—helping their children while managing their own work and personal life—can create an unfathomable amount of daily stress.







How are things going in your home?

Perhaps you already feel discouraged after getting off to a less-than-perfect start. Try a shame-free do-over with different strategies as many times as you need until you find a combination of strategies that do work. I'll share some recommendations for adults with ADHD who must adjust to working from home, and then I'll offer suggestions for those who must juggle their own work while assisting their children who now attend school from home.

WORKING FROM HOME

Obviously, each person's situation is different, so the details in these strategies may need to be adjusted based on individual needs and other factors.

- Set up a work area that is conducive to getting your work completed.
 - If possible, use a room or a section of a room that is not normally used. If you only use that area for work, it will help train you to focus on work when you are there.
 - Replicate the things that worked for you in your office, such as having an external monitor and keyboard for your laptop.
- Reduce distractions as much as possible.
 - Try to set up your work space in a quiet location.
 - Use Google Chrome extensions such as Dayboard or Forest to block access to websites that will get you off task (such as social media or YouTube). Dayboard also includes a checklist that reminds you of tasks that you need to be completing when you try to go to a new web browser tab. Alternatively, use computer programs such as Freedom or Cold Turkey to block websites and computer programs that will be distracting.
 - Keep your cell phone on do not disturb so that only notifications from your family members come through to reduce distractions.
- Structure your day to the extent possible.
 - Get up at the same time each day. Shower, eat breakfast, and follow your normal routine as though you were going to the office.
 - Include time for a workout or other physical activity
- Plan out your day.
 - If you share responsibilities for children or other household members (such as an elderly parent), meet together at the beginning of the week to map out a schedule for each day of what hours you are going to work, which hours your significant other or family members will work, and who will be responsible at which times for care for children or other family members as needed.
 - Put work hours in calendar and try not to schedule meetings outside of the set times that you will be working. If your significant other does the same, then you won't have conflicts where both of you or other family members are working at the same time when someone needs to be with children or a household member in need of care.
 - If you have to care for older children or a family member who does not need constant care, adult family members can work at the same time. However, plan breaks into your schedule to check on children or household members periodically throughout the day.



HELPING KIDS WITH REMOTE LEARNING

Here are some suggestions:

- Have your children maintain a normal routine. Stick to their regular times for getting up, eating breakfast, getting dressed, and anything else that they typically do in the morning before school.
- Block out time in your day to help your children make a schedule. Include the assignments they are going to complete that day and when they have live classes to attend.
- Try to be available to get your child started on schoolwork each morning. For younger children especially, schedule break times for yourself right before live classes start so you can make sure that your child has logged on for the class.
- Help your children set up automated reminders. Having reminders about live classes, taking breaks, and so forth will enhance both their independence and your ability to focus on your own work. Google Calendar reminders or ones from a personal assistant such as Google Home or Alexa can be very useful.
- Set up a check-in system about schoolwork. Use an age-appropriate system that gives your child as much owner-

ship as possible so they can update you on their progress throughout the day. For example, your child could email you after completing each task from their to-do list. Alternatively, your child's daily plan could be in a shared Google Doc. The child can mark off each assignment when it is completed, and you can check the document when you take breaks.

- Have your children use a timer when taking breaks to avoid getting off task for too long. This is important, especially for those who struggle with time management or distraction.
- Help your children stay on task while using a computer by blocking access to distracting websites. This is often very helpful. Set up Google Chrome extensions such as Dayboard or Forest, or programs such as Freedom or Cold Turkey, to block access to social media or websites that tempt them to get off task. Dayboard also includes a checklist that reminds the user of tasks they need to complete before going to a new web browser tab.
- If children have cell phones, keep their cell phones away from the work area. This usually significantly reduces distractions.

Although challenging for all of us, and especially problematic for adults with ADHD, the coronavirus pandemic situation does provide an opportunity to work on areas of weakness. To help you grow as a person, use this time to address structure, organization, time management, and other skills that may be difficult for you because of ADHD. You will hopefully come out of this experience with positive gains. Growing in these areas will also help you to feel more relaxed and be happier while sheltering in place.

Do your best to make improvements, but remember that it is a process and you are not going to be able to magically make things perfect overnight. Learn from any mistakes you make along the way and keep working to improve. Start over as many times as necessary until you find the right system of strategies for success with working remotely and helping your children manage online learning. You can thrive during this unsettling time and translate many of the gains made back into your daily life when the crisis ends. 🗣️

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