

A Parent's Guide to Surviving School Closure

By Stacey Owens Howard

With recent changes in our “business as usual” lifestyles, families are preparing for possible self-isolation, having thoughts of loss of freedom and separation from love ones. COVID-19 has rocked the world and stirred up a lot of mixed emotions surrounding worry and fear. If not handled correctly stress levels will increase and anxiety will take over. Schools are closing down and parents are finding themselves back in the role of being their child’s first teacher. Here are six tips for surviving school closure.

1. Remove the fear

Take time to talk to your child about what is going on in the world around them. This is a lot to process for everyone including children. Imagine the feelings and emotions your child is experiencing when all of a sudden without notice their normal everyday routine is yanked out of their control. Kids are accustomed to seeing their peers/friends everyday while in school, they follow a strict schedule filled with academics, recess, lunch and other routines. This sudden change in routine can be very difficult for ADHD or autistic students. You will observe their inability to effectively communicate the need for a daily schedule. Behaviors and emotions may flare, and you will hear them constantly saying things such as “I am bored”. Use communication and awareness as a tool for combating inappropriate emotions.

2. Mirror the school’s schedule

To keep the academic learning ongoing, many schools have provided students with packets of work to complete during the closure. Ask your child’s teacher to provide you with a copy of their classroom daily schedule. Design a homeschool schedule that mirrors what your child is accustomed to doing. During the math block work on the math practice sheets, during the reading block complete the reading sheets and eat lunch around the same time. Once students are operating in a schedule that is mirrored to their regular day a sense of security and structure is reestablished.

3. Establish exploration times

Kids are born to explore; they are curious and love experiencing new things. Build in moments for brain breaks such as dancing and singing or trying kids’ yoga. Have recess and send your child outside to play in the yard if weather permit. Recess is an electronic free zone. Do art projects, and play games, these moments will remind students of elective classes that are reflected in their regular school day. Finally schedule virtual field trips such as virtual trips to the museum and other interesting learning places.

4. Celebrate success

When assignments are completed celebrate with words of praise like “I am proud of you, you gave some wonderful answers on your assignment”. Celebrate with high fives, hugs or celebration dances. Celebrating success and efforts will encourage your child to continue striving to do well. Don't forget to celebrate your patience and efforts during the process as well.

5. Don't be afraid of Not Knowing

School curriculum has evolved over the years. Many parents may not understand the common core way of teaching and learning. Nor will most parents understand how to implement state standards and objectives. Do not be ashamed of not knowing how to teach the content. Remember one thing.... Google knows everything and You tube shows it all. When in doubt just use google for samples or look on you tube for videos that can serve as a model. Let modern technology help you with the teaching.

6. Remember it's a journey not a race

Don't try to do everything at once. Pace your child with assignments to prevent anyone from becoming overwhelmed. Challenging behaviors such as crying, asking for frequent bathroom breaks or other distractions are often strategies students use to escape or avoid work that is difficult to them. If your child is struggling and showing signs of frustration, stop and take a break to regroup. It's important to let your child know your expectations for completing the assignments and hold them accountable for doing so.

When you find yourself filled with anxiety and you desire the need to be calm, just remember (Phil 4: 6-7 NIV) “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

Be Blessed during these times.