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seven simple steps TO SUPPORT ONLINE LEARNING

By EMILY HANKINS & ASHLIE BURESH, Teachers

This time of year usually brings anticipation of new school supplies and old friends. This school year anticipation is replaced with apprehension. While it is impossible to know exactly what the school year might entail, we do know that technology and online learning will play a bigger role in education than ever before. So how can we, the parents (with limited tech skills), help our children (the digital natives)?

STEP 1 - OWN YOUR FLAWS

Do not pretend to know everything about technology, because chances are you don't. If your kiddo asks you something you don't know, admit it and then work to find the answer.

STEP 2 - BE OPEN TO LEARNING

You are your child's best advocate and teacher, and you are not alone.

Open communication with your child's teacher(s) is key. If you have a question, ask them. Often, a technology question that might take you and your child a day to figure out could be answered by the teacher in a quick email or two-minute phone call.

Some schools are planning ways to teach parents how to use the technology needed for digital learning. If you feel unsure about your technology skills, take advantage of these opportunities.

STEP 3 - STAY POSITIVE

Online learning may not be all fun and games, but try to stay positive, especially in front of the kids. They will mimic your attitude. If they get grumpy about online learning, everyone's life is going to be harder.

STEP 4 - DISCUSS TECHNOLOGY ETIQUETTE

Remind your student to mind their manners while attending online class or when in a digital meeting. For example, they can show they are paying attention by making "eye contact" with others on the screen. Remembering not to do things like texting or eating while on screen goes a long way to show respect. Younger students may need a reminder that zoom is not show and tell time.

We like to compare the internet to a big city. Visiting an educational website is like going to a park. If you leave the park you could get lost or end up in an unsafe neighborhood. Younger students need to stay in the park and require more supervision, while older students should be allowed a bit more freedom to explore.

While on a digital meeting, sitting with their back to the wall helps the student insure that others in the home stay off the screen. Don't forget about sound; train your child click "mute" anytime they are not talking.

Make sure everyone in your household knows when an online meeting is happening, so they can help to limit distractions. Feel free to listen in, but if you have a question for the teacher, save it for later. Class time is for kids.

STEP 5 - TAKE SAFETY SERIOUSLY

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No matter how old they are, it is a good idea to check in with your child often about their online activity.

If you have questions about the appropriateness of a website, or other media, one of our favorite resources is CommonSenseMedia.com.

STEP 6 - KINDNESS COUNTS

When it comes to online communication, kindness counts. Because students can't see each other's faces and reactions, it is easy for them to forget that there are real people with real feelings on the other side of chats, emails, and social media conversations. Because of this, cyber bullying is a BIG problem. Talk to them about using kind language just as they would in person, and to report cyber bullying if they see it.

Here are the three steps to handle unkind online behavior:

1. **Document it** – print it or screen shot it.
2. **Delete it** – from the original source so no one else can see it.
3. **Report it** – to a trusted adult.

STEP 7 - KEEP A SCHOOL SCHEDULE

Set up a schedule and be consistent. This will help everyone keep their sanity and will make routines of going to bed and waking up in the morning easier when school is back in session.

Make sure your child is taking screen breaks and spending time moving. Build outdoor "recess" into your day. It is amazing how refreshing 15 minutes away from the computer feels. If you find your child is becoming irritated or frustrated take a short walk to set the "reset" button.

If your student finishes their assigned work ahead of schedule, ask their teacher(s) for ways to supplement their learning, or let them "play" on education websites. Your school librarian is a great source for digital learning resources.

Digital learning will not be perfect, but these steps can help. Parents, caregivers, students, and teachers are in this together and, despite the apprehension, we will learn and grow from the experience. ■

About The Authors: Emily Hankins and Ashlie Buresh are veteran teachers and the authors of The Summer Before Kindergarten





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