

How Educators Can Help Parents: 6 Remote Learning Tips

1. Ask parents what they need. It sounds simple, but educators sometimes bypass this step or don't ask the right questions. The first step to helping parents through this difficult time is to concretely understand how their school district can help them. Questions to ask in a survey, offered in multiple languages, include: Do you have reliable internet access at home? Are you comfortable troubleshooting technology problems for your children? What is the ratio of digital devices to children and adults in your home? How much time do you have to devote to helping your child learn? What were your biggest frustrations with remote learning in the spring?

2. Invite ongoing feedback. Parents' feelings prior to the semester might change once the school year begins and families get acquainted with their teachers. Check in with parents throughout the school year to find out whether they need any help with technology tools or whether their schedules or other needs have changed. Communicate with parents using the method they prefer: text messages or phone calls to individual parents; Zoom calls with groups of parents who sign up; dispatches via the learning management system.

3. Keep the learning curve manageable. Parents often have to help students log on to learning platforms and navigate online courses. But many parents aren't familiar with those interfaces, and find it difficult to juggle numerous passwords and procedures, particularly for students with multiple courses or subjects. Schools can ease these burdens by streamlining the number of required technology tools and coordinating consistent approaches for teachers to take when designing the layout of online platforms. Similarly, while some parents may be inclined to be extra hands-on during the remote learning experience, teachers could provide a friendly recommendation to parents that they resist the urge to help solve every problem a student encounters.

4. Turn off unnecessary email notifications. Many ed-tech products automatically bombard parents and students who sign up with trivial email notifications. Parents have enough information to sift through during an unprecedented public health and economic crisis. Tech leaders should work with teachers to help them turn off those notifications or instruct parents and students how to proactively do so themselves.

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SOURCE: Education Week reporting

5. Develop resources for parents to use if they need help. Families need to feel supported even when they're not interacting in person with school staff. Some schools have added help desks for parents to call with questions, or posted resources online on a parent portal. Others are even offering professional developments for parents to learn how to use technology tools and help their child succeed. Communicate clearly to parents where they can find helpful resources, and remember that students' success often goes hand in hand with parents who are confident they can provide support.

Parents can also be valuable resources for each other, but they often don't know where to start. Online parent groups are fairly common on platforms like Facebook, but it might take a teacher to bring up the idea, reinforce its value for offering support and encouragement, and even share a link to an online parents' group.

6. Instruct parents to tell their children to avoid using personal devices for school activities. When parents and students log in to school programs and platforms from their personal smartphones and laptops, they open up schools to a wide range of potential cybersecurity threats.

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