

## Answers to the most common questions asked during our live webinar on September 9, 2020:

### How do children ask for help if they are delayed in speech or non-verbal?

This will be specific to each child. If your child uses an AAC device (like Proloquo2go, PECS, etc.) they should have an icon for "help" that they can tap or share when needed. If they are not yet proficient at using their device, or are inconsistent, you may need to look for behavioral signs that your child is getting frustrated, tired, overwhelmed, etc. and prompt them (even if it has to be hand-over-hand to begin with) to use their AAC device. As soon as the child taps on the help/break icon, reinforce this by giving a short sensory break or help them with whatever task they are trying to accomplish.

### I have twin boys age 5 who are autistic, any tips for younger students and distant learning?

Young children can be difficult to engage in distance learning, but it is possible. If your boys tend to work in more of a discrete trial format (teacher or aide is working one-on-one with them), that same teaching method should be utilized in DL. Students need to start by being taught where to focus (we often like to use large arrows that point to where the child should be attending) and begin with fun and already mastered (things the child can do) activities. So maybe they start by working individually with the teacher and they are asked to wave "good morning", point to an item for calendar and then do some jumping jacks- all while it is modeled by the teacher/aide. Slowly, the expectations for the child are expanded and as they are able to attend for longer periods, the teacher introduces novel tasks and provides a high degree of reinforcement. If your boys are generally included in a general education class and do not receive 1:1 assistance, you may want to ask your school if it is possible for them to have 1:1 time to get started on a task and for regular "check-ins" to ensure they are following instructions and participating. Setting them up with a peer model/buddy is also recommended.

### My daughter always insists on turning her video OFF because she doesn't want to be seen in the class chat. Any suggestions?

Starting with the antecedent/determining the function of this behavior, I would recommend talking to your daughter about why she doesn't to be seen – that information will let us know how much we should push her to keep the video on. For example, some students have anxiety about how they look on camera – in this case, you can normalize that many students and the teacher probably also feel this way, and that just because you can see yourself now on zoom doesn't mean people weren't able to see you before! You're just aware of it now. As an antecedent strategy, she can prepare herself to feel more confident about her looks (e.g., wearing her hair a favorite way, changing what's in her background, turning off the feature to see yourself). Also discuss the positives of having video on – it makes for a richer connection, she can earn rewards, etc. From there you can negotiate a starting point with your daughter and teacher to keep her video on for X amount of minutes for X class period (even if it's only a minute, that's a starting point!). Again working with the teacher, incentivize and reward your daughter when she is able to do this, and praise her for her effort for trying even if she doesn't meet her goal. Slowly increase the amount of minutes as she's able to consistently meet her goal and "sit with" her uncomfortable feelings.

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**I have three children in distant learning, two with special needs. ASD and learning disability, I cannot keep them focus, I need help!**

A good place to start is by setting up a clear schedule for each of your children. That schedule can include the time, the activity, and even something they can earn after they are done with that task. This schedule can be posted near your child's work area. When the day is broken up into different parts, with pre-determined breaks, it can help keep your kiddos on track! Timers are also a great tool to help keep students on track. Lastly, you can also try to start small and build up from there. In other words, have your kiddos stay focused or "on-task" for shorter periods of time with breaks in between tasks. As their ability to stay on task increases, slowly increase the time you expect them to stay focused. Incentivizing/using rewards for when the parent "catches" them on-task may be useful. They can earn points/stickers when parent sees them on-task and work up to a larger reward at the end of the week (ex. Four of five days of meeting the goal can lead to renting a desired movie).

**I am experiencing the same- my son is 17 and will click off and access rap videos and sing and chair dance during class!**

It is always helpful to set up clear times when earning that break is acceptable. Some students need more frequent breaks, while others can go much longer without one. The best place to start is to identify why your son is signing off and listening to music. Is he trying to avoid school, does he want access to his music, or is it a little bit of both? You can start by implementing some antecedent strategies such as setting up a break schedule or a self-management system. That can help clearly lay out what the expectation is so he isn't wondering when it will be okay to listen to music - he will know when to expect it. Lastly, you can try a technique wherein you set up a timer for a specified period of time (e.g., 10 minutes). If he lasts the entire 10 minutes without signing off of class, and the timer goes off, he can earn a specified number of minutes to listen to music, and so on. After a few days of doing this for a 10-minute time period, increase that time to 15 minutes. You can even make it a game! Eventually, the goal is to increase the amount of time your son is staying on-task.

**When you send more info later to attendees, more very practical tips from the Behaviorist. Please provide more examples of language parents can use, common examples found in distance learning. Any examples of visual cues parents have found helpful. Also tips Noya was giving about decreasing prompt dependence. Maybe a whole webinar about just this topic!**

1. Be proactive not reactive: Implement strategies BEFORE behaviors occur. Think about ways to set up an organized system of clear expectations that should be followed.
2. Make time to provide reinforcement (especially before behaviors occur): Set up a break schedule first thing in the morning, rather than offering that break or escape once behaviors start. Find times throughout the day to let your child engage in a desired activity. Give them those organized and pre-determined brain breaks to help keep them on track.

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3. Communicate with your teacher: If you plan to implement some sort of reinforcement system or break schedule, let the school know so that they can reinforce your efforts in the classroom. When students know that their team is working together, they are more likely to comply with the plan in place.
4. Language: when you need your child to do something, we often ask (e.g., “can you please finish your homework?”). This is making it optional, as your child can say “no.” Instead, try to phrase things as a statement (e.g., You need to finish your homework, but what do you want to do once you are finished?) Give your child something to look forward to before they start the task.
  - Giving them a “choice” in the matter can be helpful too by using statements such as “you have your math worksheet and your essay to finish tonight. Which would you like to start with?”
5. Functional communication: Repeatedly tell your child that if something is hard, if they need help, or want to take a break, all they need to do is use appropriate functional communication to let you know (e.g., their words, through an AAC device, sign language, any means of communication).
  - Perhaps work with the teacher to create a special sign to communicate they need a break.
6. Reducing prompt dependence: Start by doing the task with your child while sitting next to them. Once your child is starting to do their work consistently, tell them, “I will be doing something in the other room for 5 minutes and will be right back. When I get back and see you have started something I will stay and help you finish the rest.” Slowly increase that time so that they gain more independence.

**What Ms. Alperson has stated is quite helpful, however, I have tried this only to find that they digress into playing video games, can you help me?**

If you find that your child’s only reinforcer is playing video games or engaging in virtual activities, you may want to first provide a list of choices of break activities that don’t require additional screen time. If you know video games are the most potent reinforcer for your child, set a clear time limit on how long they can play. An effective strategy can be to set up a contingency that looks like this, “You can play 45 minutes of video games when you are done with your school work. If you are able to get off and shut down your game when I ask you to in 45 minutes, you can continue to use video games as your break tomorrow. However, if you have a hard time closing your video game when I ask you, that won’t be an available option tomorrow.” Now, your child has a decision. If they get off the game when asked, you let them know they can play again tomorrow. If they refuse to get off, you should follow through on your word. Your child should know that you mean business! Lastly, always set a reasonable expectation. If you tell your child they will be losing video games for a week, that may be hard to follow through with/doesn’t necessarily correspond with the behavior. Telling your kid he will lose out on the opportunity for that day, but can try again the following day, will increase the desire to engage in an appropriate behavior to prove they can do it and earn what they want.

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### **What can we do when the teachers are not available (office hours are not available until the following week) and my high school student struggles with completing his work or getting started?**

In regard to staying organized and understanding what's required between weeks, a planner, as well as a "To Do" list could be helpful. This will ensure that your child is aware of what needs to be tackled each week. In addition, many high school students are forming virtual study groups, for students to work collaboratively with one another in virtual pods. Such study groups meet regularly and could be successful in keeping students engaged. And, sometimes classmates make the best teachers. Classmates motivating one another can sometimes lead to better outcomes in comparison to parents attempting to. If your school is not organizing such study groups, encourage your child to form one with those classmates he enjoys working with. Incentives may be helpful as well for self-starting and completing work each week. What may incentivize your child? Be sure to work with school staff as well to brainstorm ideas and incentives. The school may have other ways in which your child's needs may be met, such as through tutoring or coaching. Lastly, if your child's school has a clinical team, be sure to communicate what your child is experiencing with them as well. This will help to ensure that there aren't underlying issues contributing to school avoidance and lack of completion.

### **What about small spaces ? How do we help with the distractions**

For more fidgety and easily distractible children, less is more in their workspace. Minimizing environmental distractions such as phones ringing, timers going off, talking in the background, etc., could go a long way in providing an environment that's conducive for learning. Less in the way of things on walls as well as minimizing clutter could be super helpful as well. If a space is being used by multiple people and it's simply too hard to minimize noise based on how small a space is, headphones can be a great resource to help block out background noise. Divider walls can be helpful as well as they can block from sight movement occurring by others.

To watch the webinar, visit <http://thehelpgroup.org/webcasts>

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