

## **HOMESCHOOLING DURING COVID-19 ~ Why all kids may not need eight hours of instruction a day at home.**

With the COVID-19 pandemic leading to school closures across the country, parents are now trying to manage the educational needs of their children at home. But parents are not teachers. They may have limited knowledge of how to meet these educational demands, and many have limited resources.

Being the principal, teacher, lunch lady and janitor all in one seems to be an impossible task, so many parents have turned to social media, using humor as a coping mechanism by creating memes with the popular hashtag #homeschool2020.

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Jokes aside, parents are legitimately balancing their children's educational needs while maintaining their own sanity. Experts are now weighing in, saying a key tip for parents is to recognize what level your child is on and not push them past their limits. Also, parents should remember that a home is not a school, and it should remain your child's place of peace and safety.

Experts agree that just because children are in school for eight hours a day does not mean that they need eight hours of instruction at home. Children in different developmental stages require different strategies for instruction and have different attentional and processing capacities. In addition, each child has his or her own learning style and personality that parents must consider when working with them.

When there is a mismatch between parents' expectations and their child's performance, it can cause frustration for both. To avoid this, experts are sharing a few top tips to help parents craft a personalized home school schedule.

**Research suggests a simple rule for figuring out how long children can stay focused: Multiply the child's age by 2-5 minutes.** So, if a child is 4 years old, he or she will be able to focus for 8 to 20 minutes, maximum.

So when you are making your schedule, keep their attention span in mind. The other factors of attention are your child's cognitive, language, and motor skills level. These domains are tested by professionals, so this is not something that you will be able to do from home. However, you can use the developmental guide below to help you create a great home study plan.

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## **Create a home study plan based on your child's attention span**

**Elementary age students can tolerate from 1-2 total hours of instruction per day.** Kiddos in this age group will need help staying on task and organizing their work. Developing a predictable routine can help with their lack of executive functioning skills. Do not punish kinetic learners for not being able to stay in their seats; instead try scheduling in motor breaks. This would also be the perfect time to work on reading skills. Read with your child and then have them read to you.

**Middle school age student can tolerate between 2-3 total hours of instruction per day.** Kiddos in this age group are learning how to be independent and have a more robust social life than their elementary age peers. Therefore, using video conferencing platforms will be helpful keep them engaged with their assignments and with their peers. If you find that your kiddos are not focused or not participating in an activity, maybe it's too challenging for them. Enlist the help of their teachers or find an online tutoring service to help your child through the struggle.

**High schoolers can tolerate between 3-4 total hours of instruction per day.** Adolescents in this grade can and should participate in the planning of their schedules. While they may need less management than their younger peers, they may need more encouragement as well. Remember that teens are also prone to changes in their mood and sleep patterns, so do not take their temperament changes personally.

When implementing this new schedule, remember that your child's teacher has learning objectives that involve knowledge, attitudes, and skills. So, your children are not just learning "facts" at school. This should help you to feel more comfortable when you decide to spend an afternoon baking cookies rather than in traditional instruction, since many math skills are used in the kitchen.

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Also, keep in mind that this is a time of crisis and there are professionals who are crafting plans to get the students up to date when they return to school. Your job is to keep them healthy and return them to school emotionally intact.

- You are NOT restricted to school hours. Do whatever is best for you and your family.

- Add in ample breaks and snack times, as it is difficult for kids to sustain attention.
- Incorporate talking, reading, singing, and role playing to make learning fun.
- Incorporate chore time into the schedule. Measurements, ratios, and other mathematical concepts can be learned right in the kitchen.
- Use discipline as an opportunity to teach, since impulsive and forgetful behavior is inevitable.
- Do reach out to the teachers about their proposed schedule for your child, as they are professionals and know what your child's age group can and cannot handle.
- Utilize the resources that your child's school has provided and do not get overwhelmed with the wealth of resources online. Let your children's teacher guide you regarding what may be helpful.

If your child is taking medication for ADHD or other psychiatric conditions, this is not the time for a medication holiday. Continue medications as prescribed. If you have questions or concerns about the medication, call the prescriber. *Dr. Colette Poole-Boykin is a child psychiatry fellow at Yale-New Haven Hospital and a member of the ABC News Medical Unit.*

