



Create a Learning Space and Limit Distractions

Many children and young adults with autism are now learning in their home setting due to building closures or physical distancing requirements. To build new routines and support online learning, it will be helpful to create a designated learning space and reduce distractions. Several helpful tips are described below:

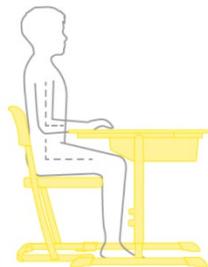
Designate a space: Find a quiet area in your home that can be used for online learning.



Try to avoid areas that are commonly used by your child for other activities like eating, playing, using screens, or sleeping as it can be difficult to transition back to learning from

those other activities. If possible, declutter that area of your home and set it aside to primarily be used for online learning. The fewer distractions, the better!

Consider the basics: At a minimum, your child will need a surface to work on and a device to use for online learning. Think about your child's height when selecting a working surface and whether they can pay better attention sitting or standing. Make sure there is room to set up a computer, tablet, or other device on that surface at a distance that gives a good camera angle for your child and allows them to see images and text for online lessons. Chairs should be supportive such that your child's back and legs form an "L" shape and



allow your child's feet to rest on the floor. If the chair is not the correct height, they can also rest their feet on a step stool or box.

Personalize the space: Consider your child's learning needs and interests when designing the space. Include your child in choices about the space when possible. Try using special interests like TV characters to personalize and motivate your child to use the space and think of it as a fun place to be.

Set up a routine: Before the start of online learning, it may be helpful to set up a routine of going to the online learning space daily. It may help to have a similar routine as you did when your child went to school in person (regular wake-up time, morning routine). Another idea is to practice "going to school" by setting up video calls with family or friends in the space. Some children may need to build up to the amount of time they will spend in that space, so you may have your child start working there for an amount of time you know will be successful and then build up gradually.



Many students with autism have sensory regulatory needs that impact their ability to thrive in a learning environment. We recommend talking to your child’s IEP team about adapting any individual accommodations to your home. Here are some general ideas to consider:

Seating: Some students with autism may attend better to online learning using simple alternatives to sitting at a desk.



Your child may prefer to stand up during online lessons or even to walk back and forth across the

room. If available and needed, you may want to have a seating option like a bean bag chair or sensory seat cushion to help your child focus.

Fidgets: Many children and adults fidget to stay focused during online meetings.

Students with autism may find light sensory input from fidgeting helps them focus too. Some good silent fidget toys to try include liquid timers, foam stress balls, Rubix’s cubes, fidget spinners, and



marbles. Some students find chewing gum or doodling with pen and paper helpful as well. Check in with your child’s teacher to see when/if fidgets are appropriate during online learning lessons.

Headphones: Consider using headphones to reduce auditory distractions, especially if your child will be working with other people in the room (siblings, parents, neighborhood learning group) or in a busy area of the home. Headphones will make the instructor’s voice clearer and help your child engage in online learning. Noise cancelling headphones or playing soothing music through headphones may be helpful during independent work times.

Motor movement breaks: Even with other supports in place, it is important to build in time for movement breaks during the day. Depending on what works with your family’s schedule and in your home and neighborhood, you could try activities like taking a walk or run, doing jumping jacks, or jumping into a pile of pillows.

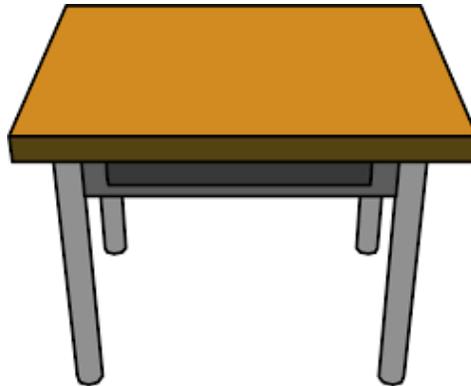
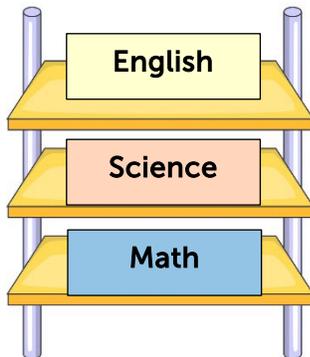
Resources include:

Structuring an Area for Online Learning
Learning Space Checklist

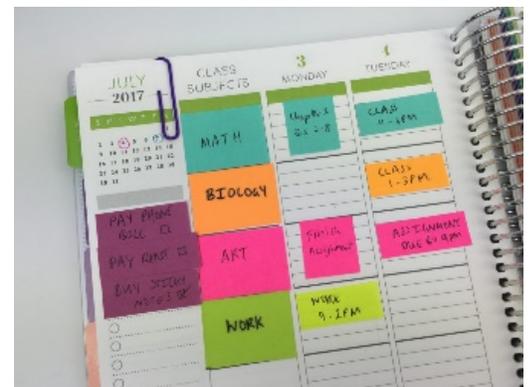
Social Narrative: School is at Home

Structuring an Area for Online Learning

1. **Organize the table/desk area from left to right** where the left side of the space is for tasks that need to be completed, the middle is cleared for working, and the right side is designated for materials that are finished. You may want to provide bins/baskets that are clearly labeled as work “to do” and work that is “finished.”



2. **Color code materials by subject** to stay organized or use favorite characters to personalize materials for organization. For example, a Marvel comic character could identify each subject.

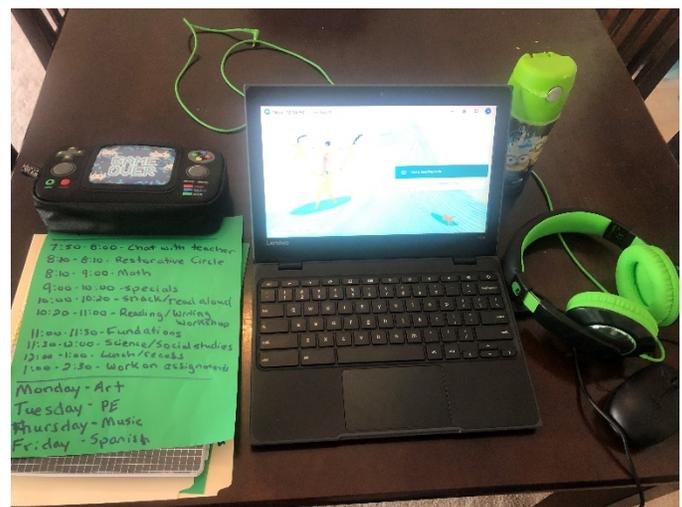


3. **Create physical barriers** between your child’s work area and other parts of the room. This may be especially important if multiple students are working in a room of the house or the room serves multiple purposes. Use rugs, shelving, a tri-fold presentation board, curtains, etc. to distinguish one area from the other.

Based on principles of structured teaching which originated from the University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program.

Learning Space Checklist

- ❑ Pick a dedicated learning space with good lighting
- ❑ Set a learning schedule (see the next section for tips on creating a learning schedule)
- ❑ Clear any clutter or items that may be distracting
- ❑ BUT leave some personal preferred items - check in with your child for ideas
- ❑ Ensure equipment and/or devices are charged, plugged in, and are working correctly
- ❑ Organize needed materials - this may include a notebook and pencil to take notes
- ❑ Clean up the space at the end of the school day



School is at Home



There is a virus that is making people sick. My school is closed so that students and teachers do not get sick. Even though I am at



home, I can still learn. My class meets on the computer instead



of at school. I pay attention to the teacher and participate in

class. It is important that I stay on topic and use kind words just

like I would at school. I will go back to school when it is safe to



learn there. Learning at home keeps me, my family, and my

friends safe and healthy. If I get worried about the virus, I can

talk to my family or teachers.