



Project Exploration's Parent Toolkit

Help your student thrive with **STEM@Home**

May 2020

Table of Contents

Creating a Schedule	3
Learning loss and how schedules can help	3
Tips for all ages	3
Tips for early elementary	4
Tips for upper elementary and middle school	4
Responsible Tech	5
Introduction	5
Interacting with peers	5
Security and passwords	5
Using apps and unknown websites	5
Fact Checking	5
Smartphone use	5
Engaging with Your Student and STEM@home	7
Your Involvement is key to a student's learning	7
What's in a STEMkit?	7
How can you help?	7
Where can you find more resources?	7

Creating a Schedule

Learning Loss and How Schedules Can Help

We know that breaks during the year, whether unexpected or not, cause learning loss. The things kids learn during the school year are forgotten when they go into long breaks such as summer vacation. These breaks also affect students in ways that are more than just about how they do at school. They affect the way students act with their friends and teachers.

Most school environments operate with a schedule or routines. These help young people because they give students a sense of control and help them feel good about their ability to succeed. When young people know what to expect and when, it creates an environment that feels predictable and safe. Schedules improve a student's emotional and mental health.

You can create structure at home to prevent learning loss and to help your child continue to learn at home. Try creating a schedule of events during the day! You are the expert on your house and your child. As such, you can change the type of activities and the amount of time for each depending on your home and child. However, your effort to create any type of schedule during school breaks will help kids keep what they have learned, continue to grow, and feel confident in knowing what you want from them and that they can achieve it.

Project Exploration has collected these tips to help:

Tips for all ages

- Start the day at the same time every day
- Set a certain amount of time for your kids to get ready and eat breakfast.
- Help children plan for transitions. Remind them what comes next and how much time they have to activities before moving on with your routine.
- Stick to the routine when it's working, but also know it's okay to be flexible. Give your student choices that stack the odds in your favor:
 - "You can finish your homework now or you can finish it after lunch."
 - "You can focus on your math homework now or write your essay."
 - "You can choose to play with blocks or color, but I need you to play on your own"
- Praise specific behavior when they are getting it right.
 - "Thank you for getting your homework done today before I had to ask."
 - "I'm proud of you for working so well on your own today so I could take my calls."
- Remember this is a tough time for everyone. Your kids miss their friends and routines as much as you do! Ask open ended questions and actively listen to their response.

Instead of . . .	Try . . .
Did you have a good day at school?	Tell me about your day at school.
Will you do that next time?	What would you do differently?
How is school going?	Tell me about what you like most at school.
Did you hit him?	Tell me what happened just now.

- Give your child words to express their feelings and acknowledge their emotions:
 - "It's okay to feel that way."

- “I can see that you’re feeling angry/sad/frustrated.”
- “Is there something on your mind? You look concerned.”
- “I know you are frustrated. I feel that way too.”

Tips for early elementary

- Explain every morning what will happen during the day
- Try a read aloud of a favorite book to start morning activities. Encourage your child to talk about favorite characters, the story, and where it takes place.
- Move to free play. Rotate toys so children can explore in different ways with blocks, coloring books, dress up, clay/Play-Doh, cars/trucks, and other toys you have at home.
- Break for a small snack.
- If the weather is nice, go outside to play. It’s good for your family to move your bodies and get fresh air at least once per day. When outside, encourage children to explore and describe their environment!
- Enjoy lunch and rest time, depending on the age of your children.
- Begin the afternoon with some time for school activities -- practice numbers, letters, writing, math facts, reading on their own, etc. Ask their teachers what they would be learning at school and help them explore those subjects at home!
- Go outside again for more free play or allow your child to choose an activity for a set amount of time.
- Wrap up the day and move into evening activities.
- *Make sure the length of each activity is appropriate for the ages of the children.*
- *Have clear start and stop points! Give children a countdown when the time of each activity is about to run out and warnings (e.g. “You have 5 more minutes.”)*
- *Encourage children to demonstrate executive functioning skills -- transitions, moving with a sense of urgency, collaboration, time management, self-control, and flexibility.*

Tips for upper elementary and middle school

- Have students sign into their learning portals or visit their work, and create a priority list. Tell them to identify what assignments need to be completed by today, tomorrow, and later in the week, and to get started on the most high priority items first.
- Help students set a timer for an amount of time that mimics the length of their classes. Once their “class timer” goes off, set a “transition timer” that mimics the transition time they would have in the halls.
- Help students minimize distractions -- no tech or chatting unless it’s transition time.
- Give an hour lunch break and encourage students to go outside and move their bodies. Fresh air and movement is important for everyone, at least once per day!
- After lunch, use the time to focus on specific skills -- math facts, reading, vocabulary, etc.
- Finish the day with more time in the learning portal, or work. This will be their opportunity to finish up any tasks for the day and get a head start on tomorrow.
- *Time management and prioritization of tasks is key--use a planner or note cards to organize thoughts and tasks.*
- *School for this age group is very important for the social aspect. Do not take away social time. Allow them to use “transition time” and “after school” to get the social contact that they would normally get while in school.*
- *Encourage students to find answers to their questions on their own and be resilient.*

Responsible Tech

Introduction

Students are on technology more than ever before now that they are learning from home. It is important to remind students to be responsible when online so they can stay safe. While most teachers and organizations will provide students with safe websites, it's easy to click around and get to a site that's not as safe and secure, or to accidentally download the wrong app.

Share the following tips with your students to keep them safe, and always make sure you are monitoring their online activity.

Interacting with peers

- Be kind! While working with your peers and teachers virtually, respect their opinions and disagree in an appropriate way.
- Block and report anyone who is being disrespectful or saying harmful or hurtful things.
- Cyberbullying has consequences. Do not engage with others in a threatening way.
- Be careful and safe with what images you are sharing online. Sending certain images has major consequences.
- Remember that what you put on the internet stays there forever!

Security and passwords

- Never share your passwords with anyone, except with a trusted adult.
- Make your passwords difficult and never use your name, street address, or other basic information that could be easy to guess in a password.
- Be careful when clicking on links in emails -- only open links from people you know!
- Make sure your laptop, tablet, or phone is locked so your passwords stay safe.

Using apps and unknown websites

- Make sure you're downloading the correct app -- many apps have similar logos/designs.
- Read reviews and agreements before downloading anything new onto your devices
- Turn off location services for any app that doesn't need it.

Fact Checking

- Make sure students use reliable sources. Not everything on the internet is true.
- Double check facts and ensure that information is confirmed by multiple sources.
- Ask the 3 Ws: Who is writing? What are they writing? Why are they writing this?
- Check yourself! Just because you agree with something doesn't mean it is a fact.

Smartphone use

- Putting your phone down for blocks of time is healthy for your eyes and mental health.
- Do not use your phone directly before bed -- it will keep you awake.
- Do not sleep with your phone charging in your bed. The charger could produce sparks which could harm you or start a fire!
- Consider parental controls and location services -- these things can keep a child safe if used appropriately and shared with the correct people.

Engaging with your Student and STEM@home

Your involvement is key to your child's learning

The more time you spend being involved in your child's learning, the more likely your child will succeed in school! Your involvement not only reinforces the things kids learn in school, but it also provides a platform for learning throughout life. It can also improve a child's behavior, reduce school absences, boost a child's confidence, and create a better learning environment while in school. Every little bit counts!

STEM@Home was created to make sure your child may continue to learn STEM skills while not being able to attend the program, but they will learn more when you participate with them!

What's in the kit?

- Packet of 20 STEM activities at varying difficulties -- most can be completed by any age
- Materials to help complete the activities, but most supplies required are things you may have in your house
- A note from Project Exploration
- Bonus activities and information from Project Exploration's partners

How can you help?

- Help your student gather and organize materials for the activities
- Film your student completing an activity or take a photo of their final project so they can share it with Project Exploration and their peers
- Help them post it on social media and tag @ProjExplore so we can see their work
- Read the activity and links provided in the "Additional Resources" section so you can talk to your child about what they have learned
- Ask your child the "Think About It!" questions and film their answers or write them down
- Share what you know about the topic or learn more online together
- Earn points as a family by submitting what you learned to the "Share It Portal" on Project Exploration's website: www.projectexploration.org/share-it
- Find a topic or activity you both love and do it together! Send us your ideas to us by texting our STEM@home Hotline at 312.772.6634

Where can I find more resources?

- Find more STEM@Home activities: www.projectexploration.org/stemathome
- Call or text the STEM@Home Hotline: 312.772.6634
- If you need other information, not related to learning or STEM, contact our PE Cares Hotline at 312.702.1370 or visit www.projectexploration.org/PEcares