



OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Family Supports for English Learners

HELPFUL TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS DURING THE PERIOD OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

As a parent or guardian, you may be feeling overwhelmed with the responsibility of managing your student's education. Even if you have been provided with many activities and learning materials, you may be struggling with knowing the best way to help your student engage with the information. The tips and strategies outlined below will help you successfully support your student during these challenging times, even if you feel unsure about taking on the role of "teacher." These tips can be used with any [learning materials](#), in any setting, and will help support your student until the return of traditional school.

MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUR FAMILY FIRST

Before focusing on instruction, make sure that both you and your student's basic needs are met, that you are safe, and that you are providing your student with caring support.

Answer their questions, and talk to them in a developmentally appropriate fashion about the changes happening around them. Stay calm, be honest and supportive, listen to any concerns or thoughts, and reassure them to ensure safety and security.

It is alright to answer questions simply by saying, *"I don't know, but adults understand your concerns and are working hard to get things back to normal."*

SUPPORT YOUR STUDENT

Remember that supporting your student at home is not the same as "home-schooling" your student. It is not the expectation that you and your student replicate eight hours of school, across multiple subjects, and follow a traditional school schedule. Refer to guidelines provided by the [Oklahoma State Department of Education](#), or your district's guidelines, regarding reasonable expectations for daily instructional time.

MAKE CONNECTIONS BEFORE INSTRUCTION

Relationships are a key piece of effective instruction, and the best teachers know that the greatest learning takes place when students feel safe and connected to the adults around them.

Engage in non-academic, family activities that build positive feelings between you and your student before attempting formal instruction. This will enable students to gain the most benefit from structured "learning time." These activities are also perfect opportunities for parents and guardians to provide incidental instruction.

Ideas Include:

- Going on family walks (identify different animal species, geography, plant life, etc.)
- Playing board games (work on numbers and counting, strategy, etc.)
- Engaging in your student's favorite extra-curricular activity from school (arrange an instrumental or vocal performance, have PE activity by going running, etc.)
- Engaging in virtual events (online lectures, study groups, etc.)
- Learning through everyday family activities like cooking (measuring ingredients, reading a recipe, science of cooking temperature, etc.)

- Reading books or magazines together (reading anything together offers a fantastic opportunity for learning.)
- Allowing students to interact with friends, teachers and other important people virtually or on the phone to maintain and build social skills.
- Taking virtual tours as a family (many museums, national parks and galleries offer free virtual access to their facilities.)

Any activity that a family enjoys doing together can be used to promote learning!

CREATE A DESIGNATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Try to designate an area in your home where your student can consistently engage in structured learning assignments. Having a specific learning area will help your student understand the difference between academic and non-academic activities.

Tips for Setting Up Your Learning Environment

1. **Create a specific work space.**
This space can be a desk or table, the kitchen table (when not used for meals), a corner of a room, or another place that is set aside specifically for structured learning time using curricular materials. If at all possible, avoid spaces that are used for relaxation or pure fun (e.g., bedrooms are for sleep, play rooms are for play, etc.).
2. **Schedule a specific time for learning.**
Be as consistent as you can and communicate the learning schedule for your student. For example, you might say, “Learning time for math will be right after Dad gets home from work, from 6:00-6:30.” For older students, have them commit and be ready to monitor their learning time at specific times each day. Posting a schedule in a visible place serves as a great reminder for all students and caregivers. When life is not normal, routine is key.
3. **Make sure that learning materials are ready to be used in the work space.**
Pencils, papers, work packets, computers and other supplies should be organized and accessible in the designated work space.
4. **Allow for frequent breaks, and be flexible if learning plans change.**

USE AN I DO, WE DO, YOU DO APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION

The *I Do, We Do, You Do* approach to teaching is time tested, easy to implement, and effective.

I Do

The instructor models the skill or behavior that they want the student to learn. You can start with, “Watch me [do this math problem; read this sentence; measure the flower, etc.]”

We Do

The instructor and the student engage in the skill or behavior at the same time or side-by-side. This step creates the perfect opportunity to provide positive feedback to your student and may be repeated as necessary.

You Do

The student shows the instructor that they can complete the target skill or behavior independently. Allow your student to demonstrate mastery two to three times and then praise them for their work.

This strategy can be used to teach any kind of material.

USE QUESTIONS TO TEACH

Students often learn best when teachers ask them questions that require reflection on their own knowledge. This technique shows the instructor how well the student has learned target concepts. Ask questions, encourage your student to look for answers, and share additional resources your student may need to fully consider the question. Questions may be asked during any instructional activity.

Types of Questions to Ask:

1. Questions that require a **search for information**:
 - “Where could we look to find out how to answer that question?”
 - “What did the character do in the last chapter?”
2. Questions that **analyze for understanding**:
 - “Why is that the answer to number 3 on your work packet?”
 - “What animals are nocturnal?”
 - “Why do you think we turn the oven to that temperature for baking cookies?”
3. Questions that **explore personal feelings**:
 - “What do you think the character is feeling?”
 - “What excites you about learning to ride a bike?”
 - “How do you think your teachers feel about not having school?”
4. Questions that **encourage application of knowledge**:
 - “What kind of chart could we make to classify this information?”
 - “Which wrench do you think we should use?”
 - “Why do you think this is important?”
 - “How does this fit with what we talked about before?”
5. **Reciprocal questions** that require a learner to generate their own questions about a lesson or concept:
 - “What questions do you have about plants?”
 - “What would you like to know about this book before you read it?”
 - “Which parts of this assignment do you think will be the hardest?”

INCORPORATE DAILY EXPERIENCES IN TO INSTRUCTION

Not all lessons need to be structured or come from formal lesson plans, everyday activities are amazing opportunities to learn!

Cooking, budgeting for a new pet or household item, doing household chores, playing games, using kind words for conflict resolution, and completing other family tasks can easily incorporate reading, math, science, research, social skills, and even more advanced subjects. Look for ways to use the *I Do, We Do, You Do* approach and *Questions to Teach* in real-life learning opportunities.

HAVE OLDER STUDENTS ASSIST IN INSTRUCTION

Teaching a concept is also one of the best ways to learn the concept. For families with multiple students, it is appropriate for older siblings to occasionally help younger siblings learn content. Model for older students the *I Do, We Do, You Do* approach in working with their siblings. This strategy is beneficial for all students as it allows more time for instructional planning, provides for additional learning opportunities, and fosters positive sibling relationships within families.

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

- Routinely speak with your student’s teachers, so they can help clarify lessons.
- Pace yourself by choosing specific areas to focus on each day.
- Celebrate every learning accomplishment, no matter how small.
- Prioritize family time over structured learning time (e.g., pick playing a game over arguing about completing an assignment).
- Take time to reflect and engage in your own self-care. Remember that we are all learning in this new and uncertain time.

FAMILY GUIDE FOR BILINGUAL STUDENT LEARNING

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	LINK
Colorin Colorado	A bilingual site for educators and families.	https://www.colorincolorado.org/
Digital Dialects	Language learning activities and vocabulary games in 50 different languages.	https://www.digitaldialects.com
Empowering ELL Parents & Families at Home	Article discussing how parents can be helpful in their children’s literacy development, regardless of their language, education, or literacy level.	https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/empowering-ell-parents-families-home
For Families – Bilingual parent resources	Bilingual parent resources that include reading tips and games, bilingual booklists, ideas for using the public library, and videos of children’s authors, illustrators, and musicians.	https://www.colorincolorado.org/families
Global Storybooks	Global Storybooks is a free multilingual literacy resource for children and youth worldwide.	https://globalstorybooks.net/
Helping Your Child Succeed: Helpful PreK-12 Tips	Article that provides tips to help students succeed in every subject, from preschool through high school, and includes suggestions to ensure children are developing socially and staying healthy.	https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/helping-your-child-succeed-helpful-prek-12-tips
Raising Bilingual Kids	Article discussing how bilingualism is good for a brain development, makes communication with grandparents and relatives easier, and is an advantage when finding jobs in the future.	https://www.colorincolorado.org/raising-bilingual-kids
The Importance of Home Language	School readiness and school success for children who are dual language learners are tied directly to mastery of their home language. This series of handouts is designed to provide staff and families with basic information on topics related to children learning two or more languages.	https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series
Unite for Literacy	Site dedicated to ensuring that all children have access to books that celebrate their cultures and languages.	https://www.corp.uniteforliteracy.com/

Why Reading to Your Kids in Your Home Language Will Help Them Become Better Readers	Article discussing strategies parents can use to help their child develop his or her literacy skills in the family’s native language (Spanish focus).	https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/why-reading-your-kids-your-home-language-will-help-them-become-better-readers
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This [fact sheet](#) details practices that will help limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Also available in [Spanish](#) and [Chinese](#).

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