

How can parents and teachers support elementary students as they learn from home during COVID-19?

Schools across Canada have had to adapt amid the global pandemic, resulting in many students learning remotely. Teachers are being asked to lead learning virtually in the family home while families are being asked to support students in ways that may be unfamiliar and potentially overwhelming. While schools are important for a child’s learning outcomes, research has demonstrated that positive family involvement can have a significant impact on student achievement. This doesn’t mean that schools cannot make a difference, but rather these unprecedented circumstances are calling on schools and families to work in partnership to support student learning.

Here are some questions that teachers and families can ask when developing and implementing home-based learning activities, including tips to support student participation:

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF	TIPS
<p>1. Can the activity be easily done in a home setting, and is curriculum being used in a flexible way that fits with family activities/interests or things that families might already be doing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing online activities is difficult. Don’t try to recreate the school classroom at the family dinner table. Just having worksheets and powerpoint slides online is not the answer. • Find teachable moments in everyday activities including cooking/baking, board games, reading a storybook, etc. • It’s important to keep an open line of communication between teachers and families to identify the diverse needs of students and their households (e.g. level of expertise, interests, access to resources, culture, language).
<p>2. Is there a focus on literacy and math?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and math are fundamental skills required for daily life. Learning how to read and write and do mental math occurs gradually over time. • Try finding little ways that prompt children to practice mental math. For example, when playing the card game ‘go fish’ you can’t ask for a card directly, but make up arithmetic questions (e.g. you can’t ask for 10 but can ask for a card whose face value is equal to 8+2).
<p>3. Are the activities taking up a major portion of the day?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think quality over quantity. We should never underestimate the learning that can happen through talking. Some parents are still working and at best have only gained commute time. • Ministries/Departments of education are recommending 5 hours a week doing school work – that’s it. This means just 1 hour per day of school work (e.g. 20 minutes of reading a book, 10 minutes of math exercises, and 30 minutes of teacher-led time a day).

If families are deciding not to complete teacher-assigned activities, this might mean that families are finding it challenging to play school in the home. A partnership between school and home is one where each partner has something to gain and shouldn’t feel exhausting to either teachers or families. This can be achieved by integrating curriculum expectations within everyday family activities in ways that consider their interests and unique needs. Creating learning experiences that are family-centered can help to better support student learning – and most importantly– student well-being during this time.

For online resources and at-home activity ideas, please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education-COVID19

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