

How to Use This Book

We want this guide to be as useful for you as possible. You might choose to read it from beginning to end; others might want to dip in and out of the sections that they're most interested in. The four sections provide information on different aspects of the distance learning experience.

We begin this resource focused on the basics. Household routines have been upended and finding balance has been a challenge due to external and internal stressors. We make recommendations for creating learning environments and routines. We provide ideas for supporting your child's engagement with the school and its teachers. And, importantly, we remind you to take care of yourself.

The second section focuses on what you can do to help your child learn. We share ideas that can help keep learning at the center and suggest ways to maximize the time that teachers are engaged with your child. We try very hard to provide information and ideas in ways that are not overwhelming for you or your child. After all, the teachers will be working to ensure that your child is learning. Select the ones that are tailored to your family and your child. These are organized as quick reference guides:

- **What is it?** A short definition of the concept
- **Why is it important?** A brief discussion of its role in learning
- **Why is it important in distance learning?** The value of this as a home support for distance learning
- **Take action:** Suggestions for ways to implement it
- **Key messages:** Short summary statements to capture the main points

The third part focuses on your child's well-being. Academics are important, but so is social and emotional development. We know that you are concerned about your child's socialization and social skills. And we know that every parent wants their child to develop productive, healthy relationships with others. These are organized similarly to the previous section and include some landmines to watch out for.

The final section of this resource focuses on the mindsets for your children and your family—mindframes that will serve them well long after the current crisis has ended. Each of these is a brief principle that serves you and your family well, along with key messages. Yes, your child will likely return to physical schooling. But the lessons we learn now should change the ways that schools work. The values, principles, and mindsets we share in this book extend well beyond the pandemic teaching that is currently necessary. They are ways of us working together to better the lives of children.

We thank you for your partnership. Together, we know we will get through this.

Hold Up! Please Read This!

Before you dive into distance learning, that is, the reason you bought this book, we would like to create the learning space with you. We believe that learning happens best when we are clear about our principles, the beliefs that guide our actions. Here are some guiding principles to consider as you engage in your own learning. (And by the way, they work really well with young people too!)

- ➔ Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.
- ➔ No one knows everything; together we know a lot.
- ➔ Creating space for participation and contribution makes everyone feel valued.
- ➔ Engaging curiosity, especially when we're uncomfortable, is the key to learning.
- ➔ Seeking meaningful connection gives our lives purpose.
- ➔ Acknowledge that conflict is inevitable and collaboration is essential to resolution.
- ➔ Accepting feedback is invaluable to personal growth.
- ➔ Be easy on people, but hard on ideas. This allows people to make mistakes while applying rigorous analysis to our ideas and beliefs.
- ➔ Listening is being prepared to be changed by what you hear.
- ➔ Every child deserves a great teacher not by chance but by design.

These are the norms that we hope you will carry with you as you engage with the ideas in this book, support your child, and interact with teachers.

Distance, Remote, and Blended Learning

You're probably hearing a lot of terms used to describe the ways that schools can operate given the mandates around limiting physical contact and carefully monitoring attendance in the building. There is no one "right way" for school systems to address these issues and implement some combination of distance, hybrid, and/or in-person schooling, but there are wrong ways. Thankfully, there are decades of research on these models of providing schooling. Of course, none of these studies occurred when entire systems were closed. But we can still draw on the evidence collected to make recommendations.

It might comfort you to know that the research tells us teaching from a distance is not necessarily more ineffective than teaching in person. It turns out that distance learning has what we call a very low "effect size." Effect sizes are ways to measure the impact or magnitude of something. It's rather like the scale we use to measure the impact of earthquakes. Some you don't feel; others are powerful. Research says that distance learning is not even a tremor. But we need to be careful when we analyze that research. In this case, a low effect size suggests that the setting isn't the deciding factor: in-person or distance learning is not better or worse. It should not be interpreted that "distance is disastrous." In fact, some students really excel when learning from a distance.

What matters then? It turns out, what we *do* matters rather than the medium. To be sure, what we witnessed in mid-2020 was not distance learning. It was pandemic teaching, crisis teaching, or "quaranteaching." Like most professions, we had to pivot and there was a steep learning curve. But we know more now. And, as the late Maya Angelou said, *Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.* And now we know better.

To continue on effect sizes, it turns out that interactive videos are a powerful accelerator for learning. So are intelligent tutoring systems and teacher–student relationships. We could go on, but we'll save that for the second section of this book. One of the lowest effect sizes related to technology is the presence of mobile phones. Turn them off. Yes, that's our first recommendation for your child's learning. When your child is engaged in learning tasks, phones should be off and not a distraction from the learning. [As a note, some of the young people who reviewed this for us might not appreciate us telling you this, even though they agreed that their smartphones were a distraction from their learning.]

In terms of formats for distance learning, there really is no evidence about what works best. Some school districts are fully online. Others are reducing the hours students are physically present. Others have created alternating day schedules. Still others have

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morning and afternoon split schedules. We have heard of schedules in which students are on campus one week and then off the next. Another variation of that proposed that students who were on campus for four days would then be off for ten to ensure that there was time to determine if anyone was exposed to COVID-19. We have also heard about pods of students staying together and then shutting down if someone is sick or exposed. And we have heard about groups of parents coming together in a neighborhood and having one person host all the children. These might all work. We don't yet know. We do know that there will be fewer minutes "live" with students and some time spent on learning tasks without the teacher present. Most states have revised their instructional minute requirements to accommodate distance learning.

We also know that you are likely to be disappointed in some of the decisions that your school system makes. You have that right and you should share your ideas and opinions with school leaders. But for the sake of your children, try to refrain from criticizing the decisions in front of them. They will pick up on your disappointment and it may just compromise the learning your child is able to do. We know that lack of confidence in the teacher is harmful to learning; the negative impact on the child when a parent believes that the teacher is ineffective is nearly off the charts.

We are concerned about equity. At this time, we all need to do what we can. School systems are focused on ensuring all students have access to technology and food. If you can afford a computer for your child, provide it. It may help stretch the school system budget so that other families can have computers. If you are able to support your child's learning during times that the class is not meeting together, please do so. That may save a little time for the teacher to spend with a child whose family is not able to do so. If you have time, please volunteer to be a tutor or mentor or classroom aide. This will allow essential workers to do their jobs with a little more peace of mind.

In sum, distance learning is not going to harm your child's education if there is a partnership between you, your child, and the teacher. Let the teacher teach. Support your child's sense of purpose in their education. Implement some of the recommendations in each of the section of this book. You may have to be more involved than you were in the past, but don't assume that you have to provide most of the instruction your child needs. And yes, things will get messy, there will be moments of frustration, and maybe even times when you or your child wants to give up. All these feelings and more are understandable, and this book will help you get through those moments so that you and your child can get their education back on track with your relationship stronger in the process.

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