

10 TIPS TO SURVIVE HOME LEARNING

As students and parents continue to navigate the “new normal” of e-learning from home, **John Shanahan**, psychologist specialising in children and adolescents and Learner Support Director at Hong Kong Academy, shares his top tips to survive home learning.

1. ROUTINES & STRUCTURE

We thrive on structure and daily routines are crucial in providing a layer of security to families. For younger children, it's important to make routines visual and include the schedules of all family members so there is clarity as to what everyone is doing. Remember to schedule in free time.

Top tip

Get your children to dress in their school uniforms so they are in the right mindset to learn.

2. TAKE BREAKS

It's really important to take breaks and add them to your routines. A break means time away from screens. Try doing something physical or have a chat with friends to recharge your cognitive energy so you can re-engage in your tasks. Breaks don't need to be more than 5 minutes to be effective.

Did you know?

Adults should be taking a break every 90 minutes, teenagers no more than 40-60 minutes and children about 20-30 minutes.

3. BE MINDFUL

The benefits of mindfulness are really powerful and it doesn't always have to involve a serious meditation exercise. It can be as simple as being mindful about going into the kitchen and having a glass of milk or looking at the view or going for a walk. Research has shown that being mindful for 10 minutes a day is enough to start to rewire your brain.

Did you know?

Being mindful also provides an opportunity to check in with your own emotions and recognise where your stress levels are.

4. EXERCISE

The WHO recommends 5-17 year olds need at least 60 minutes of vigorous exercise per day. Try and get your children to move as much as possible by incorporating 10-15 minute blocks into their routine to build up to 60 minutes per day.

Top tip:

It doesn't have to be long walks or runs - research shows that HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) at home can also bring positive benefits.

5. SLEEP

Children need at least 12 hours per night, teenagers 8-10 hours and adults 7-9 hours. Having consistent sleep times and wake cycles can enhance performance and lead to better health, a stronger brain and a better memory. Even a little less sleep than we need can have a detrimental impact on the above.

Did you know?

If you're an adult and you're only getting 5-6 hours of sleep, your testosterone levels are 10 years your senior - so you age by 10 years according to testosterone levels.

6. MANAGE HOME LEARNING

Most parents aren't trained to be teachers and stepping in to manage home learning can be extremely stressful for all involved. Some children thrive with home learning; they are more focused and engaged and can learn at their own pace. Others on the other hand may struggle with independence, lack of constant supervision and need additional support.

Top tip

Modify your expectations and don't let the home learning interfere with your relationship with your children. At the same time, it's important that they try to engage and contribute to home learning. If your child is really struggling, reach out to the teachers for support.

7. MANAGE SCREEN TIME

School children generally have to be on their screens a lot of the day and it can be really difficult to pull them away. Try and minimise screen time as much as possible and incorporate good sleep, exercise and breaks.

Top tip:

It can be helpful to work into your visual schedule different types of screen time:

- 1) **Work focus screen time** (research or engaging in a lesson online)
- 2) **Gaming screen time** (playing games or interacting with their peers)
- 3) **Relaxing screen time** (watching YouTube or Netflix)

8. EXPRESS GRATITUDE

A really simple thing to do and very powerful. One thing I do with the families I work with is to get them to do a 'gratitude circle' - this is where everyone goes around in a circle three times and expresses one thing that they're grateful for from the day - with no repetitions.

Did you know?

If you know you have to come up with three new things to write in a journal or share with your family, it manipulates your attentional bias so your brain over time starts to subconsciously scan for the positive things in your day and that's going to boost your mood, self-esteem and confidence.

9. "THE ICEBERG"

One of the best things I can recommend for dealing with children's behavioural difficulties is the analogy of an iceberg. At the tip of the iceberg you have the behaviour you're observing at home. Often when we focus on and try to correct the behaviour it's not very effective. What's much more effective is to think about what's underneath the behaviour - so beneath the water in the iceberg are the underlying emotions and thoughts.

During this very stressful time, all the micro triggers that the children are experiencing throughout the day are amplified because of the uncertainty and the disruption in our lives. Focusing on things that are under the behaviour is much more effective at de-escalating situations. It shifts from a problem-focused conversation to a more solution-focused conversation.

Top tip:

When my children are being difficult, I try and reframe how I see that difficult behaviour. So it's not my son or daughter being difficult, it's them having a difficult time and that completely changes how I respond to them.

10. MANAGE OWN EMOTIONS

It's really important to take a break, practise mindfulness and take time to de-stress before working with our children. When we are stressed, our children will feed off that emotional pollution so it's key to think about your own emotional states and model how you want your children to regulate their emotions.

Top tip

If you are getting stressed, use this as an opportunity to show your children in a positive way how you're dealing with uncomfortable emotions.



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City Mental Health Alliance HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

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