

How to Combat Skill Regression During School Closures

Thursday, April 9, 2020 at 7:30pm

Submitted Questions and Answers

Q1: How many hours a day should be dedicated to school curriculum so kids don't get overwhelmed?

- First, create the most inviting work space possible. Make it clean, tidy, attractive, get a snack and organize stuff – THEN start.
 - Children can be visually and auditorily distracted by surroundings; so look for a quiet place (if possible) with not a lot of distractions.
- Divide "work time" into 2-3 blocks each day. For kids K-3; 15-30 min with a 5 min break, for kids 4th - 6th grade 30 min blocks, for junior high and high school 30 - 60 min block depending on lots of things.... THE LENGTH OF TIME IS INDIVIDUAL.
- The prep is important - plan it out - allow the short breaks to be getting a snack, stretching, moving around with some music - AVOID technology on the breaks!
- Wait till you're done with the academic block for the day before they get to access the I-pads etc...) Sticker charts/token systems can help kids get through work blocks too.
- Don't underestimate the power of some little rewards strategically placed! Not too many - but something as small as a juice box or 3 M&M's after doing a block of good work can keep motivation moving along!
- Get advice from teachers, OT, SLPs, etc on the "just right challenge" for your child.
- Kids learn by doing. It does not always need to be academics. Do puzzles, legos, k-nex, play board games, etc.
- Don't be afraid to be creative with setting - work outside, allow kiddos to lay on the floor, even stand - learning can be functional without looking traditional
- When it comes to time and hours, a schedule will give you power - nothing fancy - hand written or drawn, dry erase marker on a mirror or window. Use your kitchen timer to indicate the ending. And building a schedule of work - play - work - play can be good for everyone involved - first math, then Frozen dance party...

Q2: What can we as parents do in regards to our children not receiving their services nor having any contact with special education?

- Look at the IEP - see which goals make sense to work on at home
- This would be the same with outside services goals such as private ABA, OT, or speech. Your BCBA, OT, or SLP should provide parents a list of things to keep working on at home. Telehealth sessions should offer assistance in how to run these goals.
- Follow the same plan as how to divide up the work block stated in Q1.
- Many districts located within Fresno County will be starting online services after the break. Some are sending out Prior Written Notices. If you have not heard from your child's Teacher Case / Manager by late next week, you should contact them or the special education office.
- Reach out to your school district - call and email if you have not had staff connect with you.

Q3: What are some easy ways to expand on language?

- Try to incorporate as much incidental practice as possible into your day. Here are some examples:
 - practice naming everything in the house-maybe add printed labels to household items,
 - require verbal approximations when your child is requesting-not to the point of frustration-but enough to message the need to try to verbalize a request,
 - have fun with songs - singing often helps vocalizations increase, lots of imitation.
- Practice a "present moment" game with kids - what do you see, hear, etc. Keep it FUN so language maintains a positive function - don't make it a chore.
- Keep the subject matter fun and interesting - mix language in with movement - games like Red Light/Green Light (add visuals) are simple and fun.
- At TALK Team, one of our guidelines is "MLU plus one or two" - what that means is, take your child's sentence length and add one or two words - your child says "Go" and you expand to "I go" or "go fast"
- Move beyond nouns - action words are AWESOME and you can do them!! Run and jump and dance and hop...say it and do it.

Q4: I work at home until 4 pm when my 4 y/o with Autism and sensory issues comes home from day care. I can't seem to teach him, have dinner, quality time and bath all before bed at 8 pm. Any suggestion?

- SET an activity schedule for when you get home at 4:00. This will help you and other family members as much as your child – as you all know what to expect and how to help. Designate who will do what for dinner and do it together. Maybe a whiteboard that you list each person's job for dinner – setting table, preparing food, getting waters etc. Then set aside time to have story, TV, bath....allow flexibility but having all family members know what the goals are and how available you can be for each may help.
- Children are excited to see their parents after work and may want your immediate attention. Take 10-15 minutes and give them attention by encouraging movement of the large muscles of the body. Give your child movement activities when they get home. For some families this may be more challenging if living in small spaces or places without yards. For 10-15 minutes after getting home do animal walks, obstacle courses, scavenger hunts, hide-n-seek, run outside, play catch, etc.
- After moving do calming activities, such as looking at a book and listening to relaxing music.
- Look for ways to embed teaching - can he help you in the kitchen and work on skills like sorting and matching, expanding vocabulary. The same can be done in bathtime and bed time.
- Maybe choose a theme for your week - like next week is "A" week - practice the letter A - dinner foods that start with A (apples, avocado, A shaped pancakes??) - and focus on that concept all week.
- Remember, give yourself grace, that is a lot to carry in a small amount of time.

Q5: Are there any speech apps that you would recommend?

- Fun ones to get children talking are things like Talking TomCat - kiddos love their voice coming from the cat!
- If you need schedules, Choiceworks (not free)
- Simple communication application - GoTalk (there is a free version that is a great start)

Q6: Do you have any ideas on how to co-parent and encourage the other parent to help fight regression?

- Focus on strengths - if one parent is great at cooking, they can embed teaching into making meals, another might be great at getting the child moving and can be in charge of daily alphabet walks.
- Both parents do not need to have the same tasks, but if they can agree that investing in the kiddo learning is the common goal, that is the place to start from.
- If receiving online home instruction; see if sessions can be scheduled with both parents (i.e. odd weeks with mom, even weeks with dad). Ask special education professionals to review IEP goals with both parents at the beginning of each session.
- Inquire if ESY will be offered online as well, to combat regression.
- Talk to the other parent (without the kdsi) about what your goals are for this time period. If you can, discuss what challenges you are each having as a parent right now and see where you can compromise to help the other. Then discuss goals for your children and what is reasonable for you each to do to help with those. Sometimes getting things clear and putting them down can go a long way. We often assume another adult is automatically on the same page without realizing where conflicts may be.

Q7: How do I keep my child's anxiety and fear under control?

- This one starts with you - make sure you are taking care of yourself in a way that is keeping your fear and anxiety under control. Take advantage of counseling through a telehealth platform if needed.
- Limit the news/media/discussion in front of your child - choose wisely what information is made accessible.
- Make sure that you and your child are getting enough sleep and physical activity. Also, try to maintain a consistent schedule.
- Start a practice of actively recognizing joy and expressing gratitude daily - write down or draw the things that make you/your child feel happy.
- Maintain connection with friends and family through virtual platforms and schedule times to connect regularly.
- There are some great resources for social stories for this time period - I will send the link to a story written by Carol Grey. Talk matter of factly to your child - considering age and developmental level. They know something is happening, and having appropriate information is better than not talking about it at all

- Watch the adult responses in the home around kids - they pick up on everything! If an adult in the home is worried about work or finances, this stress can easily be translated to kids in body language, tone of voice, changes in how time is spent. Keep yourself healthy and practice techniques to mitigate stress.
- Practice mindfulness as a family - or as a parent child pair....I will send a PP on this with links too! Don't underestimate the need for and the power of self-care!

Q8: Do you have any advice for grandparents on how we can help support our special needs grandchildren during the closures?

- Do art-and-craft projects and mail them to grandparents. Facetime with grandparents when they have received the mail and talk to the grandchild on how much they love the project.
- Read stories on a digital platform where your grandchild can see and hear you - keep it to favorite stories so that they can easily engage
- Lots of kids are loving doing their own Zoom meetings or Facetime talks. Love the ideas of reading stories and doing art or cooking together. They could even go for a walk together on Facetime - and explore the springtime around their block.

Q9: How do I help my son self-regulate when he is frustrated?

- If there are techniques used by your teachers, SLPs, OTs and BCBA's already - they should share those with you.
- Watch for triggers and pull back prior to frustration escalating. Prevent if possible.
- Change expectations for the time being. We may need to reduce or change what is typical in our day or what we can expect our child to do.
- Create a space in your home where the child can go to have time on their own - quiet, attractive, comfortable. This is not a space to be used as a reward, but as a needed place to calm and feel safe.
- Create a way for your child to appropriately ask to be allowed to stop a frustrating activity and get a break if necessary. This could be a verbal request, or could be a break card (you can make a picture of a stop sign or just get an index card with a red circle on it. Allow the child to show this card and give a short break. You can work on limiting the number of times the child uses the card later.
- Use music, movement and other preferred activities to help your child regulate. Movement is very useful. Music or headphones may help, playing with an item (fidget or other), or having a squeeze toy or item may help.