

## 1. Keep Children at the Center

Your districts and schools will be setting expectations for how you use your time with children. While considering those expectations, use what you know about what children really *need* at this time need to guide your actions. When you prioritize relationships and predictability in their distance learning, this will act as a model for families to pay attention to these same things. Here are some basic needs to keep in mind:



- Children need tools to critically examine challenging situations. During this time, checking in on children's social-emotional health – discussing the transitions they are making and ways to cope – is essential.
- Children need relationships, and a sense of belonging and purpose. A child's social setting for learning needs to be re-defined in this new environment. Help them to understand how they can connect with you, their friends, and their families during this time.
- Children need predictability to feel safe and plan for the future. Ensuring that children establish regular learning routines in their home environments, to the best of their ability, will help them feel safe.
- Children need to spend time talking, reading, and writing daily. Prioritizing these daily activities in their new learning environment, over other "stuff" is critical.

## 2. Manage Your Expectations

***There is going to be a lot of trial, and a great deal of error, as you enter the technology-driven distance learning space.***

Feelings of not being "ready" to do this work are normal. Whether you are developing resources for children to use at home, or are following a schedule to meet with children virtually, you are now in the position of having to try things, see how they work, and then constantly adjust and change based on your experiences. Accept that mistakes will be made. *"In other words, we should give ourselves the time and the permission to figure this out. (Merrill, 2020)"*

Experiment with a range of different online educational resources and technology. Google and Microsoft are just two companies that have a suite of services that can be used to work with children and families. CLI has also created a glossary of distance learning resources to help you make informed decisions about the technology that can support the work you want to do with children. Try to use the fewest number of different applications as possible. For example, choose one platform for live sessions, if you are doing them, and one place to store your activities, like Google Classroom. Bringing in many different applications at once will be daunting not only for you but for your children and their families.

Share your vulnerability and growth mindset with your children. Sharing that you are just as uncertain about this environment as they are and are willing to learn and grow from this opportunity can really add some perspective to this experience for children. Eliciting feedback from the children and their families about how things are going will help you to gain insight into your efforts and make adjustments based on what's having an impact on them.

***Student success cannot be measured the same way under these conditions as it was in the classroom.***

Children are not going to be able to work the same ways at home, under their current circumstances, as they would have had they been in your classroom. Expecting that level of work – in both quantity and quality – is unrealistic. As is expecting that children can engage with academic learning for the same length of time or with the same type of focus. As we know, children are faced with many distractions in their home environments. Scale back the amount of work you are expecting from children and their families, as well as your expectations for quality. When providing video lessons or doing live lessons through an online application, keep your lessons to around 10 minutes.

***Planning is still important, but priorities may be different.***

It has always been best practice to check our technology before we use it in the classroom with children. Distance learning is no exception. Before we begin using any kind of technology, we should try it out beforehand to make sure it is working the way we expect it to. Accept that there will be malfunctions and glitches; this is all part of our learning process.

Consider how to plan across a week. Thinking in terms of daily instruction is not as useful in these times. What might be realistic to cover this week?

Finally, what are the most important things to teach during this unit? This is the time to think about what's really critical and high impact. What matters most in this content that children would really want to know? Choose things that are engaging, motivating, and fun for children as much as possible. Joy is a vehicle to learning.

### **3. Build and Maintain Relationships**

***Make the effort to stay connected to your colleagues.***

If anyone understands the level of vulnerability, anxiety, and acceptance you are navigating, it's the people you work with, your fellow teachers and coaches, all who find themselves in the same position of having to support children and families in new ways. You should lean on each other for support, both professionally and emotionally.

Being in contact with your colleagues, planning with them, practicing new technology with them, and thinking about the most important and impactful things in your curriculum to cover with children in this distance learning environment, will yield benefits for children. It is important during this time for you to support each other's use of standardized materials, as well as each other's capacity to innovate useful solutions to the problems that arise.

Additionally, specialists who serve children who have IEPs need to be a part of these teams so they can help determine how children with special abilities, who may need more visual representations, more repetition, and a slower pace, can access this new kind of instruction. If children need more time to process the learning content you've provided, record your live lessons so that children can watch them multiple times (if permissible).

***Engage with families; they are in this with you.***

Families have found themselves in circumstances wrought with difficult choices and powerful emotions. Understand that families are also experiencing continually changing "job descriptions." They are now teachers, possibly on top of working from home full-time. They may be essential workers who are working out of the house,

experiencing food insecurity, or are dealing with sudden unemployment. These types of stressors on families provide fertile ground for anger, depression, and at minimum, irritability and short fuses. Many families have lost their coping mechanisms to deal with this continual range of emotions. Keeping all of this top of mind will help you to manage your expectations, and to remind you to give yourself a break as you, too, are trying to manage work and home life simultaneously.

As an educator, your support and willingness to listen will go a long way to making this experience easier for families. The more we can be in consistent contact with families, the more we can reduce the “transactional distance” families and students feel (Jung, 2020). This kind of support can take on many forms; it can look like helping families come up with a learning schedule for children or a space to work in the home, or it can look like adjusting the scope of the work we are asking children and families to take on.

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## Three Tips for a Successful Transition to Distance Learning

### Classes-

[Online.aspx?utm\\_source=marketing&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=Distance&utm\\_content=Coronavirus&utm\\_campaign=EL-SpecialIssueApril2020-041520](https://www.childrens-literacy.org/online.aspx?utm_source=marketing&utm_medium=email&utm_term=Distance&utm_content=Coronavirus&utm_campaign=EL-SpecialIssueApril2020-041520)

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