

Parents = the Difference

Welcome to a unique school year! **A** rotation! **B** rotation! Remote or hybrid. If you accidentally show up on the wrong day or time you aren't alone. In fact, the intent of this monthly newsletter is to reflect your experiences and assure you there are other parents out there just like you. This isn't meant to be a "How to Raise your Child" newsletter, but an offering to normalize what you may be feeling as you juggle school, work, and parenting. Some articles I write myself and others will be pulled from parenting resources. I hope you find this relevant and perhaps, at times, a bit humorous .

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Hybrid and Remote Learning

So here we are! Who at your baby shower could have predicted remote learning was in your future? With some four years of parenting under your belt, you've likely made a fair amount of mistakes and probably learned a lot along the way. But nothing could have prepared you or any of us for the parenting challenges of a pandemic.

If your child was in 3K last year, you have some experience with remote schooling. For those of you experiencing formal schooling for the first time, chances are you might be feeling overwhelmed, confused, or stretched paper thin. If you are lucky enough to have more than one child in school, you probably need a big chart to remember everyone's schedules.

I'm hearing it is hard for parents to understand why their 3- and 4-years-olds aren't in front of their computers learning all day. Are 10-15 minute sessions twice a day enough? After all, when they are physically in school it is a whole day of learning.

The answers to those questions are rooted in development. When a child sits in school, the day is full of hands-on activities. Young children learn from the hand to the head. In other words, they process the world through their sensory experiences. They learn best when they touch things. They learn that when they put one too many blocks on their tower, it will fall down. While teachers are doing their best to channel their inner Mr. Rogers to engage children, it is challenging to replicate the rich hands-on learning environment of the classroom.

Now consider this: it is the beginning of the school year; if this were a normal year, teachers would be working on comforting children experiencing separation anxiety, establishing routines and building relationships. There would be a full hour

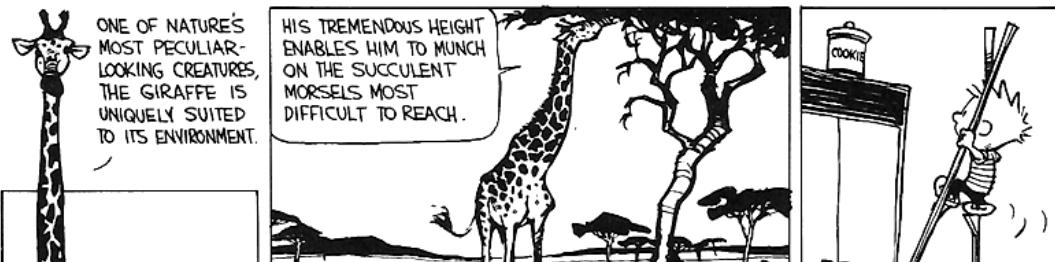
of outdoor play. Lunch, toileting and preparation for nap would take an hour. Naptime lasts about another hour. That alone comes to about 3 hours of the day.

In the classroom children spend one third of their day (or about 2 hours and 7 minutes) engaged in free play, what teachers call center or work time. Since every child progresses at their own pace, each one comes to pre-k with unique needs. Time engaged in free play allows children to meet their own needs through self-directed work. For example, a child who hasn't played much with others may chose to work alone at a table with Legos, while simultaneously observing others until they build the confidence to play with their peers. The child who has siblings or has had many playdates might go to the dress up area (dramatic play) and act out social scenarios. Both children are developing as expected and engaging in self-directed play to fulfill their unique needs for growth. Pre-k is a very individualized setting with active, vibrant options for every child.

Teacher-lead group work revolves primarily around morning meetings and read-alouds. That's exactly what most teachers are focusing on at the moment. As the year progresses, they will weave more hands-on, interactive activities into the remote experience.

And getting back to establishing routines, the immediate task at hand is helping children learn to sit in front of a computer screen and listen. This will happen when they begin to understand what they are experiencing. Young children can't sit still long. Most live classroom group meetings last no more than 10-15 minutes. Hence, for now, teacher led schooling on the computer is time limited and developmentally short (for now!).

What happens when kids are too quiet!





How much technological support do young children need when they sit in the virtual classroom? Given the skills they demonstrate navigating our phones, it is easy to assume they are technologically independent. This isn't necessarily the case.

When children touch and swipe our smart phones, they are in the driver's seat. They look at the images they make appear and then tap another box to see what else they can make happen. When children sit in a remote classroom they give up control of their experience. Instead, the teacher is in the driver's seat.

The remote classroom is a structured experience. The teacher sets the agenda and children are expected to pay attention and follow along. Young children need support to do this. Without adult support, children have been observed to wander away, play with phones or toys, or sit helplessly in front of a blank screen after the teacher ended the class and signed off.

Here are a few ways you can help your child get the most of their remote classroom experience:

1. **Give your child a heads-up** before class begins. "School starts in 15 minutes. It's time to get ready." Since 15 minutes is a big concept for 3- and 4-year-olds, follow it up with a 5-minute warning.
2. **Prepare your child for class.** Settle them comfortably in front of the computer screen. Remove distractions like toys or food. If your child was sitting in a classroom, they would be expected to sit on the rug and give their full attention to the teacher. As parents you can help them learn this important skill for success at home by stressing that sitting in class is the most important task at hand. Expresses your pride in them when they are successful.
3. **Sit alongside your child** for the 10-15 minutes of class. Children accustomed to the pace of Sesame Street and cartoons need to learn to LISTEN to a teacher who isn't supported by slick graphics or fast moving transitions.
4. **Talk with your child about the class.** Don't assume they absorb the lesson. This is a new experience for your child. Find out what they noticed. How did they feel? Do they understand that the other children are also at home with their grownups watching the teacher on a screen? Some children feel that because everyone appears together on a screen that they are only one by themselves.

As with everything else in life, young children need adults to help them make sense of their experiences. So, put on your pre-k face and welcome to early childhood remote learning!

Your New Best Friend

We hear you! Life at home has changed. There's no doubt young children require lots of attention, supervision, and guidance.

You're working from home and your 4 year-old is climbing in your lap as you Zoom. In the background your children fight with each other. Or the parent's nightmare—an eerie quiet that causes you to wonder what in the world are they doing!

This may be the time for you to befriend ROUTINE. If there ever was a time, this is the time to create a schedule for your child. It may be a lot of work initially, but once you set it up—and your child buys in—you will be a happier parent. Teachers know children love routine because they know what to expect. They may not get time, but they get routine.

Unfortunately, there isn't a cookie cutter template to follow. Every family has unique needs and will therefore require a tailormade schedule. And even with a predictable schedule, you will still need to supervise their activities. Share the job and take turns with the other adults in your home.

Here are a few ideas to consider:

Wake up your child every morning at approximately the same time. If you were leaving to go to school in the morning, you would leave at the same time everyday. Creating a regular wake up time will help regulate your child.

Get your child dressed after breakfast. Help them pick out their clothes for "school."

If your child were in the classroom, they would have a choice of "center time activities". Limited choices offer children a sense of control. Set them up for success by creating friendly work areas: a low table for drawing, a clear rug space for building, a cozy reading corner, etc.

Build in outdoor playtime everyday! The pre-k classroom gives children 50 minutes daily to run, jump, and climb. The activity not only burns off excess energy, but provides them the exercise they need to support their growing muscles and develop coordination.

OMG! Don't forget naptime! Naptime begins about 5-6 hours after the regular morning wake-up time. Expect them to sleep 60-90 minutes. Just think how much you could get done with that much uninterrupted time!

Schedule predictable meal and snack times. Now that you've been a parent for a few years, you know all too well that a hungry child is a cranky child . . .

With a regular wake-up time in place, your child should get tired at about the same time every night. Most 4 year-olds require 10-11 hours of sleep a day. Try and make bedtime a pleasant, calming experience. Bath. Story. Snuggles.

