

## IDEAS TO HELP EDUCATION STAFF PLAN FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING

Virtual learning may be new or unfamiliar to you and your staff. Use these tips to plan virtual learning for young children at home.

- Establish regular communication with families.
  - Ask families about their communication preferences and honor those preferences. Phone calls, text messages, regular mail, emails, Facebook posts, and virtual meetings can keep families engaged in their child's learning.
  - To communicate effectively with families with limited English proficiency and children who are dual language learners, ensure that staff members speak the family's home language. When that is not possible, rely on community partners, consultants, interpretation services or software, or other technology options.
- Remember that not all families have access to electronic devices or may not be able to use them because they need them for work or other activities. Programs should understand families' financial limitations with data plans. Staff can use phone calls, group or individual text messages, or regular mail to communicate with families.
  - Share information with families about the [\*Lifeline Program\*](#). This federal benefit program lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet service for eligible, low-income consumers.
- When hosting a virtual meeting or activity for children 2 years and older, be sure an adult is available to join the child. This will ensure effective use of technology and minimize the child's frustration. Children under age 2 should not be expected to join virtual meetings or activities.
- Here are some tips for successful virtual learning events:
  - Keep virtual meetings short — a maximum of 30 minutes — and give children and families resources and ideas to foster learning at home, working with them to determine the best approach for their household.
  - Keep the frequency of virtual meetings manageable for children and families.
    - For children ages 2 to 5 years, no more than one virtual meeting a day is needed to maintain a connection and engage in a fun learning activity.
    - If once a day is not possible due to family schedules, device availability, or other reasons, make a plan that will work for the family. For some families, three or fewer times a week may be most manageable.
- Continue to follow children's lead. Remember that children are playing, exploring, and learning in their homes. Ask families about what their child has been interested in and what they have been doing at home. If feasible, ask families to submit photos or short videos of children's play. Look for trends in this documentation to help you plan activities and resources for families to encourage their child's development.
- For infants and toddlers, keep virtual check-ins short. A brief hello, a game of peek-a-boo, and a check-in with family members is a great way to maintain familiarity and connections with very young children. Programs can provide books and age-appropriate toys to support learning at home during the week.



- Provide meaningful alternatives to screen time. Because young children learn by touching, exploring, and using materials, screen time should primarily be used to connect and maintain relationships with children and families.
- Virtual learning activities can provide background information and prompts for hands-on activities to follow in the home. For example:
  - To follow up on children's interest in automobile-inspired play, host a virtual read-aloud of a book on transportation and invite children to continue their exploration at home by building automobiles using cardboard boxes or other household recyclables. Then invite families to share photos or videos of their children's creations.
  - Remember to create resource boxes for families to use in the home to supplement online activities. This step makes follow-up easy and stress-free.
  - Align home learning activities and resources with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework to ensure you are sharing ideas for learning across all domains of development. Consider sharing [ELOF2GO](#), a mobile app to support this.
- Consult your program's chosen curriculum for suggestions about adapting activities, learning experiences, and teaching practices for virtual learning.
- For children 1 year old and younger, work with families to embed learning activities into their daily routines and schedules. Consider sharing [The Importance of Schedules and Routines](#) with families to guide them in the important learning that happens during daily household routines.
- For children 2 years and older, establish a consistent schedule of events (same time/day) so families can plan to include them in their daily activities. Try to choose a time of day when children would naturally join circle time or other center-based activities to keep some consistency for children.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- Set up virtual small groups by hosting a small group of families/children from your classroom or program. Make sure you give children and families the opportunity to see each other and say hi and to stay connected to each other and to you.
- Host a virtual story time with children. When hosting a small or whole group gathering, read a favorite book suggested by the children and/or families in your group.
- Host a virtual group activity with children. Schedule a small or whole group gathering and lead the group in favorite songs, finger plays, and poems. Encourage children and families to recommend songs, poems, or other familiar activities to share with the group.
- For children with an Individualized Education Program or an Individualized Family Service Plan: Connect with service providers to support continuity of early intervention, special education, and related services for children with disabilities and their families. Include planning for scheduled transitions, as appropriate. Schedule and maintain regular check-ins with families. Encourage families to share their concerns, provide updates on teletherapy or telehealth sessions as they are comfortable, and share any changes in their child's development.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR AT-HOME LEARNING

- Schedule and communicate a consistent distribution method for delivery of learning materials and resources for use at home. Be clear about the process (e.g., packets will be placed outside the center at a specified time; family members are assigned a pickup time or packets will be mailed to families each week or delivered to the family's residence on a certain day each week).
- Gather a variety of virtual activity ideas, activities that family members can do with their child, and activities that children (2 and older) can do independently or with initial support from an adult.
- Develop and share daily activity calendars based on what you know about the children in your group, adapting existing lesson plans for use at home. For example you might identify theme-based activities for children to complete with guiding questions (e.g., Monday – collect a bag of sticks, rocks, or other items found outside and sort them by size; Tuesday – paint or decorate the items using resources sent home; Wednesday – a family member hides the items and the child can find them! You can follow up by asking open-ended questions of children on your next virtual check-in. Where did you find them? What was the hardest hiding spot? Can you think of another hiding spot?).
- Encourage families to use everyday routines to reinforce children's skills and learning (e.g., sorting laundry by color, counting and sorting silverware when washing and putting away dishes. How many spoons? How many forks? Create a pattern using large and small plastic cups and/or bowls).
- Send home craft or art materials for children to create an art project (i.e., recyclables such as paper towel rolls or small boxes, along with construction paper, feathers, etc.). Have family members take a picture of the child's creation, and let the child share it on your next virtual group gathering or post it on your program's Facebook or other online site.
- Give families conversation prompts to use during play and activities with children. Share that asking questions about their child's project or during shared activities gives children an opportunity to explain what they are making or doing and why they created it.
- Remember to offer ideas for outside play, for example, walking through the neighborhood or going to a park with a list of "I Spy" objects to find, painting with water on the driveway or sidewalk, gardening, studying caterpillars and butterflies, exploring with a magnifying glass, setting up a water play station with a variety of everyday kitchen tools and bowls, or building an outdoor tent or cozy spot for reading and sharing stories.
- Remind family members that schedules and consistency are important to children and help them feel safe. Offer tips to help families establish daily routines:
  - Provide a flexible daily schedule of activities (e.g., 8 a.m., breakfast; 8:30 a.m., read a book and discuss the story or problem presented in the story; 9 a.m., create a craft; 9:30 a.m., play outside; and so on).
  - Identify play and learning spaces in the home that are OK for children to use (e.g., a lesser used corner of a room outlined with masking tape for blocks and large construction toys, a large recycled box or pillow area for reading quietly, a small table for writing or crafts). This will help children meet families' expectations for sharing space together.