



# Ten Ideas for Keeping Students with Diverse Learning Needs Engaged At Home

The world has changed (and continues to change by the hour), but despite the uncertainty, our communities are showing tremendous resilience by rallying in support of each other, especially when it comes to educating our nation's young people. Transitioning to remote instruction with little training and no time to plan is hard work, both for seasoned educators and for parents turned first-time homeschoolers. But it's critical now to do what we can to provide consistency and structure for young people amidst other challenges.

To help educators support students with different learning needs, including those with disabilities, via remote instruction and at home learning, the following top 10 considerations can guide your planning. Examples provided are meant to further illustrate each point, but will need to be adjusted depending on grade level, interest, at-home resources, student needs, and other factors.

Furthermore, we have provided guidance and tips on how families and caregivers (who are now effectively "co-teachers") can provide essential support for their children's at-home learning. As parents, this information provides ideas tailored to each child's strengths and needs. As teachers and administrators, this information should shape how you communicate with families. Greater collaboration between educators and families can more successfully facilitate remote learning practices and can buffer the stress and potential anxiety experienced by students in this new learning structure and environment.

## 10. Know Your Students' Access to Technology.

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Different tools have different functionalities depending on whether they're being accessed on laptops, tablets, phones, etc. Additionally, many families have access to little or no technology or have to share the technology they have.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

It's helpful to keep a running list of what tools each child is using to ensure you are planning accordingly. Include notes about the level of knowledge family members have about how to use that technology. You may want to offer explicit instruction on how to use the tools being offered so families can best support their children.

### What Parents Can Do::

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Underscore your openness and willingness to communicate with teachers about your situation. With greater awareness, teacher's planning can more readily be informed by some of the tech-related challenges in the home.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Parents may want to keep track of each child's use of technology during the day in order to moderate potential challenges that arise with too much screen time.



## 9. Provide Low- or No-tech Alternatives.

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

If possible, each assignment should have a modified option for students who do not have access to the necessary technology.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Consider providing phone-in options for lessons or using common household items for learning activities when it is appropriate. For example, ask students to complete puzzles or use dice to create their own math games. Depending on your community, students could volunteer to swap resources by leaving them on each others' doorsteps.

### What Families Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Families should know that limited or no access to technology is not the end of the world. Communicate with teachers to find out what the grade-level (academic) expectations are and what generally is covered at this stage in the school year. Then do your best to tailor activities accordingly.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Take inventory of your games, cards, and puzzles. You may not realize you have tools at home that you can leverage. Monopoly teaches math and card games teach strategic thinking. Cooking (especially with a recipe) can teach math and science. Embedding small reading tasks into daily activities or asking comprehension questions can also build literacy skills.

## 8. Provide Instructions Multiple Times and in Multiple Modalities.

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Many students with behavioral needs or other disabilities benefit from receiving instructions multiple times and in different formats.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Consider chunking assignments and asking students to hand in smaller tasks in sequence in order to scaffold learning in ways that provide more access to students who need more structure to complete multi-step problems. It might also help to record short videos modeling assignments so students can watch and rewatch tasks as needed.

### What Families Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

As much as it is feasible (and understanding the challenges of this time), try to be part of learning. Ask your child's teachers if you need support with new concepts like what the "chunking" of a task may look like.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Families can support the learning process by creating "to do" lists as well as visual schedules for students who may need additional scaffolds and support. Engage your child in creating the schedules - you might be surprised what they come up with!



## 7. Deliver Content in Different Ways.

### What Teachers Can Do:

### What Families Can Do:

#### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Varying how your students interact and learn is an essential piece of making instruction inclusive.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

In a given day, try switching between video instruction/content, worksheets, independent reading, and learning through hands-on projects to maximize engagement and provide unique entry points for children with diverse learning needs.

#### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Be aware of the methods your child is using to engage with learning (e.g., reading, web apps). Only using one method may be challenging for children who benefit from hands-on, active learning.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

Parents might want to try a virtual field trip to a historical building followed by creating diorama-representations with legos, cardboard, or magazine cut-outs. Students can present what they've created to their teachers or to others in a photo or via web conference.

## 6. Let Students Choose What to Work On.

### What Teachers Can Do:

### What Families Can Do:

#### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Allowing students opportunities to select topics to study or methods for demonstrating knowledge can help students with disabilities play into their strengths and feel more confident.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

For example, for a lesson on building comprehension, try asking students to read or listen to a book about a topic of interest and journal or draw daily about their reflections.

#### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Leverage loved ones or other community members as a part of the learning process. Distance learning allows people who are not close by to engage in your child's education in ways that traditional classroom learning does not.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

One way to focus on learning and use this opportunity to strengthen your child's executive functioning skills is by having students plan and interview loved ones or community members over video conference and then decide how they want to present their subject's lives.



## 5. Know Your Students' Strengths and Teach to Them.

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

As you develop materials and content, take advantage of your students' diverse needs to connect with their strengths. Motivating high-levels of participation from students may be especially difficult during this time, making the gathering of information about student interests (especially non-academic interests) all the more important.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

For example, because many students with ADHD benefit from experiential learning, keep them engaged by putting together a virtual scavenger hunt where students have to use the internet to find answers and resources on topics of interest.

### What Families Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

You know your child. Take this opportunity to further communicate with teachers about your child's strengths and interests.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Sit down with your child and brainstorm a long list of "fun" activities and then connect each activity with something your child wants to learn about. Give them a sentence starter, such as "Activities that would make my at home learning more fun include \_\_\_\_ and this can teach me about \_\_\_\_."

## 4. Establish Routines and Communicate Regularly.

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Even if your school or district isn't requiring any specific outreach or communication, teachers who have regular and ongoing contact with their students and families will help provide much-needed support and continuity.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Try having a regular time to respond to emails and daily video conference office hours. Or make it a rule of thumb to check in on each student at least once a week by phone.

### What Families Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

While positive and predictable structures are important for children generally speaking, they are particularly important when working with students with emotional disabilities or students with autism. Even if they are minimal, regular communication and consistency of routine can go a long way to helping children through these challenging times.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

Connect with your child's teachers to find out how consistency and routines can be reinforced at home.



### 3. Build In Downtime.

#### What Teachers Can Do:

##### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

For some students with disabilities, such as students with autism, home instruction could be a needed respite from the sensory inputs of everyday life.

##### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

Encouraging partner work over email or phone, either semi-structured or even unstructured, provides students with opportunities for communication and social skills development in a lower-stakes environment.

#### What Families Can Do:

##### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

While families may be worried about learning loss in what could be a long-hiatus, it's important to remember that taking breaks promotes more focus in the long run.

##### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

Make sure you provide opportunities for unstructured down-time to keep spirits high. Children can do this by playing at home with their siblings or riding their bikes outside.

### 2. Practice Self-Care.

#### What Teachers Can Do:

##### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Be kind to your students and to yourself. Many of us are juggling several hats right now, teaching our students, teaching our own children, getting resources to loved ones, and supporting families through this difficult time.

##### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

Some educators are creating wellness check ins for their students through a Google doc, form or other platform and asking them to let you know how they are doing. Consider doing something similar for your peers or colleagues to support each other.

#### What Families Can Do:

##### **IDEAS FOR PLANNING**

Be kind to your child and yourself! Remote learning doesn't have to be perfect and making your children feel physically and emotionally supported is of most importance.

##### **PUTTING IT INTO ACTION**

Try to make time for your child to participate in his/her/their teachers' virtual office hours or organize virtual happy hours for children and adults to check in with one another.



## 1. Keep Learning

### What Teachers Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Don't forget to routinely reflect on your practice. Asking what went well, what could have been better, and what needs to happen next time after each lesson can go a long way to getting you up to speed quickly with remote or home instruction.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

If you haven't already, dig into the materials from CAST about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is a helpful framework for planning instruction for learners with diverse needs and has many technology-based solutions that can be used remotely.

### What Families Can Do:

#### IDEAS FOR PLANNING

Recognize that as a first time "teacher" you may have a steep learning curve, especially if you are juggling your own full time job.

#### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

See if your child's teachers can give you some basic training so you can be more supportive in the learning process. Share your expectations for learning with both teachers and your child.

At ABC, we created an open Slack community as a forum for teachers and parents to talk about how they're supporting students with disabilities through remote learning. We've been intentional about offering a space away from the pressures of social media and believe we can build a virtual community of dialogue, honesty, compassion, and support if we all commit to engaging and sharing what we can.

Try these strategies and tell us what resonated. Offer your thoughts on what special education should look like via remote instruction. Share your wins. We are in this together. Please feel free to join us at this link: <https://www.theabilitychallenge.org/join-our-slack-community/>.

And if you're looking for additional support as you transition to remote instruction or as you think about transitioning back to school, contact us at [info@theabilitychallenge.org](mailto:info@theabilitychallenge.org), follow us on social media ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)), and subscribe to our newsletter at [www.theabilitychallenge.org](http://www.theabilitychallenge.org).