

# CREATE STRUCTURE

Balance Your Job  
and Your Child's  
Educational  
Needs



by Carey A. Heller, PsyD

**W**E'VE NOW COMPLETED THE FALL OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, following a spring and summer of lockdown and social distancing. Depending on where you live and where your child goes to school, you are likely navigating remote learning or a hybrid approach (such as two days in-person; three days online). At the same time, you may be balancing a job where you are working from home, at an office, or employing a hybrid approach.

For many people, there are several differences between the situation this fall and what the spring was like. In the spring, the shift to remote learning and work was sudden with little time for planning. And, for most families, being at home for school and work remained in effect for the remainder of the school year.

Some families now find themselves with children starting the new school year with remote learning while one or both parents have to be in the office. For those families with students who attend school in a hybrid model, keeping track of the schedule can be tough. Furthermore, as COVID-19 infection rates fluctuate, families may find themselves adjusting their schedules in terms of in-person learning and/or work versus remote options with little notice.

Here are some suggestions to help you support your child or teen with their remote learning, keep on top of your work, and maintain your sanity when ADHD affects one or more members of the family.

## **STRUCTURE**

- Write out and/or put your work schedule in a table or calendar. If you like electronic options, consider using a shared Google Calendar, Apple Calendar, or a program like Cozi. Note days and times for in-person versus remote work.
- Add your child or teen's remote learning schedule in a calendar or table for easy reference. List in-person days and times as well.
- Plan out your day if possible by blocking out times in your schedule when you likely will need to be available to assist with remote learning. If feasible, avoid scheduling meetings during those times, and plan to take breaks to assist your child or teen. When possible, schedule breaks once per hour or at appropriate intervals to check on your child or teen.
- Help your child or teen to be as independent as possible with their schoolwork.
  - Help the child or teen to use a calendar themselves to keep track of their own schedule. Include links for video class session to allow them to easily connect at the right time for classes.
  - Use Alexa, Google Home, and other notification programs to help children or teens remember to log on for classes and complete specific tasks.
- Have a family meeting each morning and do a quick

review of everyone's schedule for the day to make sure it is fresh in their minds and to make any necessary last minute adjustments.

## **REDUCING DISTRACTIONS AND IMPROVING FOCUS**

- Set up a good workspace for working from home. If possible, use a room or an area of a room that you can dedicate to work. Using a desk and keeping it clear of nonessential items would be ideal. In addition, if you have trouble sitting still, consider the following:
  - Standing desk (or desk topper that converts a regular desk into a standing one)
  - Desk bike or elliptical under your desk.
  - Yoga ball or other similar type of chair or cushion that allows some movement.
- Make sure your child or teen has a good work area. For younger children who are likely to need more assistance, if feasible, set them up somewhat close to you so that you can more easily go back and forth to help them. If you have to be in the same room, noise cancelling headphones can be useful. In this situation, having a separate room that you can go into when you have to make phone calls would be important. Alternatively, structure the day where your child has set break times to go into a different room when you have phone calls.

## As COVID-19 infection rates fluctuate, families may find themselves adjusting their schedules in terms of in-person learning and/or work versus remote options with little notice.

### ADVOCACY

- If feasible, talk with your employer about childcare issues and see what flexibility is available in working remotely or adjusting work hours to accommodate your child's schedule at home.
- Get help from a spouse or other family members or even friends as needed. For example, with a household with two parents, have one parent on-call at set times to help with child duties while the other one participates in mandated work tasks or gets work done. Sharing responsibilities will be much easier if you plan ahead and schedule times when you are free to help your child while your spouse works.
  - Especially for older children and teens, a useful alternative would be to ask grandparents, aunts, uncles, or close family friends to check in on your child or teen remotely at set times if you have to work in person or cannot step away from remote work tasks.

### FLEXIBILITY

- Start your learning/work plan with whatever school modality is currently occurring. Once you know what potential changes could occur (such as a move from remote learning to hybrid model or from remote to in-person working), make a Plan B for how you will handle these changes when they occur. In addition, make a Plan C for a fallback option (if everything becomes remote again, for example). This allows you to shift from one setup to another with minimal planning when things change unexpectedly.
- With work items, keep as much in the way of documents and other items needed in a method that can be accessed remotely (based on your company's rules) and have duplicate physical items that are needed (specific resource books, for example). This will make going back and forth from an office to a home workspace easier.

### One family's week

Here is an example of a family of four (two adults and two kids) and how they might use some of the recommendations in their remote learning and work plan.

Joe is a software developer who has an office, but is permitted to work at home all of the time as long as the pandemic continues. Jane is an administrative assistant at a law firm and is often permitted to work remotely. When

working on certain tasks, however, she is required to go into the office. They have two children, James (age eight) and Jack (age six).

At the start of the school year in August, both boys were attending school remotely. But in early September, the school system shifted to a hybrid approach, with the boys attending school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays, while doing remote learning on Wednesdays through Fridays.

Here is how this family is navigating the need to balance remote learning and work:

- The family has breakfast together at 8 AM every morning, and together they finalize their schedules for the day. (They conduct more in-depth planning each weekend.)
- Joe uses a guest room as a permanent home office.
- James uses an extra room in the basement as a work area.
- Jack alternates between using a desk in Joe's office and working in a corner of the family room (based on what type of tasks he is doing) as well as when Joe needs to make phone calls.
- Jane drops them off at school on Mondays and Tuesdays.
- Joe picks them up after school on Mondays and Tuesdays.
- Joe is responsible for helping with schoolwork as needed on Wednesdays between 9 and 12 PM, Thursdays between 11 AM and 2 PM, and all day on Fridays (when Jane often has to be in the office).
- Jane covers Wednesday afternoons, Thursdays before 11 AM, and after 2 PM. She arranged with her company to work extra hours on other days to account for the time she takes off during the day to help with remote learning.

There are probably very few people who truly find it simple to navigate all the moving parts associated with helping children with remote learning while keeping on top of their work for their job. ADHD can make this even more difficult for the children, teenagers, and adults involved.

By using some of the tools detailed above, hopefully you can make the experience as positive as possible and minimize stress associated with daily activities during the pandemic and beyond. 🎧

---

**Carey A. Heller, PsyD**, a licensed psychologist based in Maryland, specializes in the evaluation and treatment of ADHD and executive function issues. A board member for the Montgomery County chapter

of CHADD, he is co-chair of Attention's editorial advisory board.