balancing online schooling and working from home

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in new opportunities and challenges for those supporting and caring for young people in our community.

The transition to online schooling and working from home will be exciting for some people who may thrive in this new style of working and learning and for others this transition may be quite stressful and overwhelming. It may also be a mixture of both these experiences. All of these feelings and experiences are understandable in these circumstances.

Each household will be different in what they are managing. There may be multiple people of various ages trying to transition to online schooling and working at home or there may be just one or two in your household. Everyone will balance this differently with each household having different ways of managing and different priorities. This is okay. There is no one right way to go about this and no household will get it perfectly right.

The initial weeks of this transition will be the hardest whilst everyone is trying to adapt to new routines.

Here are some tips to support the balance of online schooling and working from home.

1. Create good communication

Creating good communication between young people and others at home will be very important during this time. It could be the difference between balancing and negotiating everybody's different needs or increasing conflict in the household.

Some important ideas for good communication include:

- **communicating early**

Start conversations and model talking early when you are noticing things aren't working so well or there are differences in priorities, expectations or people's needs being met in the household.

- **taking a 'you and me vs the problem' approach**

If you think about any problems coming up 'side by side' rather than 'you vs me' you are more likely to get a good outcome for everyone. This includes letting everyone have a turn to express their perspective, expectations and opinions in a respectful way.

- **acknowledging and summarising what each person has said when communicating**

This shows you're interested and listening to the other people. When we feel our perspective has been heard and understood we are more able to listen to what the other people have to say.

- **using 'I' statements rather than you statements**

Using 'I' statements to express our perspective or needs helps us to own what we are saying rather than giving a sense of blame that can happen with 'you' statements.

Take some time to talk about what everyone in the house is going to need to be effective in online schooling and working from home. It is good to set up a time for this conversation when everyone is available and able to be focus on what you are talking about. This conversation may need to keep occurring over time as you try things out and adapt to see how it is going.

This conversation could include thinking together about ideas such as:

- **how you will let each other know when you can be available to support young people's online schooling and when are you not able to be interrupted**
- **how you will let each other know when you need some help or support**
- **how you are going to manage shared work and schooling spaces**
- **what is working or not working for the household?**

If you feel like there is some tension between household members during this transition or you would like more ideas on communication, check out the responding to family conflict fact sheet for more tips and information.
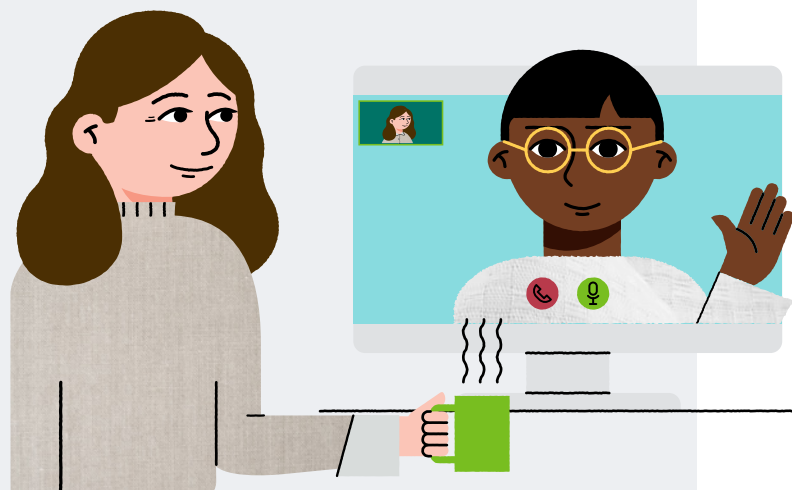
2. Consider and manage your expectations

Each household will be managing different things during this time. For some households, those working from home are going to need to prioritise work and won't be available for online schooling support. Other households will have more flexibility in moving between supporting online schooling and working.

Consider what your household is managing and adjust your expectations accordingly.

It is okay if you are not always available or if young people aren't completing all of the allocated tasks during this time. If this is happening some things to think about include:

- **using the communication tools discussed above to have a conversation with the young person and ask them about what feels reasonable and manageable. Once they have come up with some ideas, negotiate and work together to come up with an agreed solution.**
- **keeping the communication with teachers going so that they are aware of what is happening for the young person during this time.**

Usually school time and work time is a time of social contact for young people and adults too. Discuss expectations around talking to friends during school or work time and encourage peer to peer connection in an appropriate way to maintain social connectedness.

4. Foster independence

Young people are usually independent during their school day without the support of care givers to guide their work. Wherever possible, try to encourage this to remain the same.

Take some time to talk to them and ask them about what they would normally do if they got a bit stuck at school with some work or don't know quite what to do.

Some ideas might include:

- **sending a question to the teacher**
- **asking their friends.**

Independence also includes things like encouraging young people to make their lunch, choose what to do at breaks or lunch time and setting up their work space.

3. Create a routine

As much as possible try to keep to a normal routine for online schooling and working from home. It can be easy for work time, school time and home time to merge into one which can be overwhelming at times. It can be good to create routines to differentiate this time and support being able to 'switch off' from work or school time.

Some ideas around this could be:

- **taking a walk around the block or exercise when you finish work/school to mimic your usual travel home time (whilst still obeying the COVID-19 restrictions)**
- **packing down your work space at the end of your work day, closing computers and putting books away. You may even want to cover your station with a blanket**
- **changing into different clothes for work or study time and home time.**

5. Use your resources

Think about the resources that you have around you. This may be adults in the household taking turns to provide support to young people. If this is not possible, there may be other extended family members or friends that have special skills in areas such as Maths or English that young people can reach out to for support with tasks online or via phone when required.

6. Get creative and flexible

There are many ways of learning and different areas of learning for young people. As young people develop they are learning how to be independent and complete the tasks of an adult. The online learning environment creates an opportunity for young people to have the time to learn different skills associated with this process. These skills might include:

- **cooking a meal for the household**
- **helping out with chores**
- **learning how to pay bills and managing finances**
- **taking care of the garden.**

Remember to use the communication ideas discussed above in thinking about and trying out these ideas. Ask young people what they are interested in learning and negotiate to come up with what will be appropriate for your household.

If online schooling support is required consider whether these tasks could occur outside normal school house so that you are able to provide support during non-work hours.

7. Take regular breaks

Stepping away from the computer, getting some fresh air and stretching is important for everybody. If you do this on a regular basis everybody in the house will be more productive in their work and learning. It also supports good physical and mental wellbeing.

8. Model self-compassion

We are experiencing something very unusual and unprecedented at the moment with the transition to online schooling and working from home.

Remember, nobody is going to get this perfectly right. Lots of people are experiencing increased stress and anxiety at the moment and that is really understandable. It is important to take care of yourself during this time. If we can model self-compassion, talking about our experiences and looking after ourselves to young people, they are more likely to practise this themselves.

For some more ideas on looking after yourself during COVID-19 check out the 7 tips for a healthy headspace and how to cope with stress related to the Coronavirus outbreak situation.

Check in with yourself

It's important to check in with yourself and notice what might be making you feel good or what might be contributing to your stress and worries. It can be helpful to practice self-care, and our resources can help to give you a sense of control during this unusual time.

Check out our headspace COVID-19 resources for a range of information and support services:

headspace.org.au/covid-19

The latest medical information for COVID-19/ Coronavirus is changing on a regular basis. If you would like to understand more, please visit the Department of Health's website.

health.gov.au

There's support available

If you think your young person might be feeling overwhelmed, anxious or needs additional support help is available.

By visiting the headspace website, young people can connect with others, interact with self-help tools and access lots of great mental health resources. This is in addition to one-to-one direct support that young people can access via eheadspace or at headspace centres.

Help is available through these mental health organisations

- **headspace: visit headspace.org.au to find your nearest centre or call eheadspace on 1800 650 890**
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au**
- **ReachOut: reachout.com**
- **SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 or sane.org**

You can speak to your local General Practitioner (GP) and help make a plan to support your young person's mental health. Appointments with your GPs are available over the phone, via a video chat or in-person.

Search for your local health service or GP on the healthdirect website.

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If you feel like someone you love might need immediate support, help is available:

National 24/7 crisis services

- **Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au**
- **Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au**
- **Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au**