Virtual Learning
PLAYBOOK

Family Edition
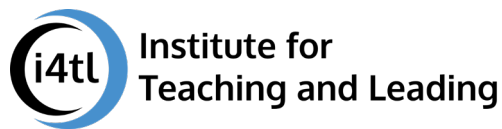
i4tl Institute for
Teaching and Leading

Embrace the Opportunity

Welcome to the world of virtual learning!

The world of virtual learning can be an amazing experience for children and their families for a variety of reasons! Among the greatest of these reasons is that children can now learn the same content and interact with their teachers and classmates in a different way - through their computer or tablet device! Virtual learning allows children to stay engaged with their coursework, their teachers, and their friends while also enjoying the benefit of working from home or another location away from the school building.

This "playbook" is designed to help you, as a family member of a virtual learner, to support the learner and help them realize success in this learning format. Of course, if you have any questions about specific courses, or if you need help with particular assignments, please contact the course teacher directly.

GET ORGANIZED

Helping your virtual learner get organized at the beginning of their learning experience is the first thing you can do to help them be successful. Help the learner identify a dedicated workspace in the home (or other location) that is quiet and free from distractions like the television and noisy conversations. In addition, be sure your learner has access to the necessary technology for their courses such as a computer or tablet device, access to the internet, and a comfortable desk and chair.

The virtual learning space should also have a place for your learner to spread out and work with other course learning materials such as textbooks, workbooks, and drawing supplies. Having a large enough desk or a table in the workspace to do this is important. To learn more about what specific materials your virtual learner will need, please be sure to have the learner ask their teacher directly.

Another really important part of helping your learner get and stay organized is knowing what is expected of them. Of course, reading this playbook will help you do this, but you and your learner will also need to communicate with their teachers to get a better understanding of their expectations. In many cases, teachers will have a "student expectations" document or a course "syllabus" posted in their virtual courses that will help learners understand what is expected of them. Be sure to take the time to review this information with your learner to be sure they are fully prepared to begin their coursework.

Virtual learners need to be proactive with developing relationships. This includes relationships with their teachers and their classmates. As a family member supporting a virtual learner, make it a habit to encourage your learner to be social with other children within and beyond their virtual courses.

You can model this behavior for your learner by reaching out to their teacher to introduce yourself and to make it known to the teacher that you are a partner in the learner's education. Maintaining communication with teachers throughout the duration of the virtual courses can be done quite easily through email or video conference. Don't be shy, your learner's teachers will be excited to work with you!

Making and keeping connections to your learner's teachers and other school staff members will help keep you informed and will demonstrate to your learner that you care about their education!

ENGAGE IN LEARNING
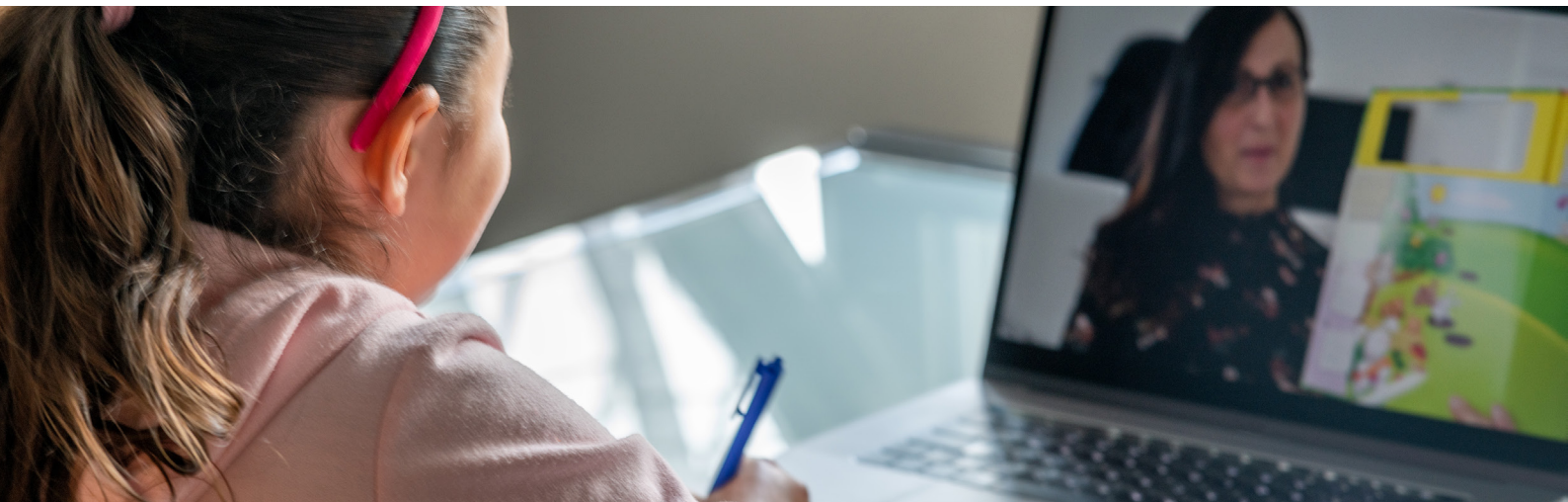
In order to be successful, your virtual learner, will need to complete all of their work for each course.

At the beginning of the learners virtual experience, it may be necessary for you to help them get started by assisting them with logging into their courses and helping them to understand where to find their course content, assignments, activities, and assessments (test and quizzes). It could be very helpful if you worked side-by-side with your learner to explore the pages within their virtual course and learn how to navigate the course together.

Help make sure your learner understands the deadlines for completing their work as well as when and how their learning will be tested. This information should be found easily within the courses, and if your learner seems confused or has difficulty finding this information, encourage them to contact their teacher to find out.

Remember, being successful in this virtual environment will require work and dedication, and your learner will need to be proactive, self-disciplined, and apply themselves.

One of the biggest challenges to being successful as a virtual learner is managing time. This can sometimes be difficult for learners, and they often need the help of supportive adults to help them do this.

While virtual learning allows learners some degree of flexibility in when and how they learn in their courses, it is important that they establish routines and work habits that nurture success. Work with your virtual learner to develop a daily routine that helps them focus on their coursework while also feeling good about how they spend their time.

Some of your learner's teachers may have requirements for connecting "synchronously" (meaning in "real time" through video conference or telephone), and if that is the case, then the learner's routine should be built around those requirements. Of course, make sure the daily routine has scheduled breaks throughout the day as they will help re-energize the learner and ultimately help them focus better on their coursework.

You will also need to help your learner be aware of how much time they are spending in front of their computer screen - too much "screen time" can make them feel tired or stressed. A good daily routine will also include some physical activity throughout the day - encourage your learner to consider activities like walking, jogging, yoga, or other sporting activities throughout the day.

Also remember, socialization is important. Learning virtually can sometimes make a learner feel a little isolated, so help them make it a point to find time to socialize and connect with friends and family.

COMMUNICATE

As we have seen in the previous pages, being successful in a virtual learning environment requires high levels of communication. Both you and your virtual learner will need to maintain regular communication with teachers to let them know what you need. Be sure you know where to get help when you need it and who to contact if you find yourself confused or struggling to understand directions or expectations. Remember, your teachers and your school are there to help you, all you have to do is ask!

Since much of the communication with teachers will be through email or other written ways, it is important that your messages are clear, thorough, and direct. Your learner may need some help with this, so be sure to help them as needed. Learners will need to use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation in all messages - the way they need to communicate in their virtual courses is different from the way they may tend to communicate with their friends through text messages. Their messages related to their virtual courses need to be more formal. Again, thay may need your help in learning how to communicate in this way.

Within a virtual learning environment, practicing good digital citizenship and internet safety is extremely important. Be sure to reinforce to your learner the importance of always being respectful when communicating with others online and protecting private information about themselves with people they don't know. For more information about digital citizenship and internet safety, please contact one of your learner's teachers, and they will help you.

THRIVE!

Your learner has an exciting opportunity in front of them, and they can control their own success!

As your learner progresses through their courses, it is likely they will face both successes and challenges. Help them celebrate the successes, and empower and support them as they work through the challenges. Over time, you and your learner will become more comfortable and proficient with working virtually, and the experience will continue to feel better and better.

In order to THRIVE in a virtual learning environment, you and your learner will need to be flexible and communicate frequently with your teachers. Stay connected to them, and stay positive and productive.

One final note…since communication is your key to success as a virtual learning family, help your learner "speak up" for themselves and own their education. Your learner's teachers and school staff are here to support you as partners in learning, so take every opportunity to let them know what your family needs so they can help you.

CHECKLIST

Take the first step toward supporting your virtual learner by completing the checklist below:

_____ I have provided a dedicated workspace for my learner that is quiet and free of distractions.

_____ I have provided the necessary technology for my learner to complete their coursework.

_____ I helped my learner obtain all of the course materials and supplies (non-technology) needed to complete their coursework.

_____ I helped my learner understand what their teachers expect of them relating to the time needed to complete coursework and how they need to communicate while learning virtually.

_____ I helped my learner create a daily schedule of when they need to be working on their course-work and when they will be taking breaks.

_____ I helped my learner create a plan for getting physical activity each day.

_____ I know how to contact my learner's teachers if I have any questions about or if I need help supporting my learner.

_____ I understand how to help my learner be a good digital citizen and keep themselves safe and their personal information private while using the internet.

_____ I am ready to be supportive partner with my learner's teachers to help my learner succeed in a virtual learning environment.

This Virtual Learning Playbook
was designed and published by:

Institute for Teaching and Leading

rethink. innovate. empower.

The Institute for Teaching and Leading partners with educators to transform teaching, leading, and learning - giving students the high-quality education they deserve.

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