



Back to School 2020

Tips for parents whose children are returning to in-person, virtual, or hybrid learning.

Dear Parents,

You, your children and our schools are preparing for a very different start to the school year. Regardless of whether your child is returning to school in person, virtually or both, this school year is sure to be filled with many challenges.

We know you are busy and probably overwhelmed as you prepare for the first days of school. We know you have questions about learning, childcare, working from home, lessons, face coverings, emotional health and so much more. We know this because we're parents, too.

This guide is the result of collaboration between Marshfield Clinic Health System child development experts and parents. It was created not so you have another thing to read, more rules to follow, or standards to achieve, but to present tips and resources that might help your family have more good days this school year. Focus on the ideas that are most relevant and doable for your family. We highly encourage you to review the emotional health sections and prioritize emotional health for yourself and your family during this time - it is key to a successful school year.



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In this document:

- Getting ready to go back to in-person school
- Keeping your child healthy at school
- Preparing for successful at-home learning
- Connecting school and home
- Tips to keep you healthy
- Planning for positive cases
- Addressing emotional challenges

IMPORTANT

Keep your child at home and follow exposure protocols for your school, if they:

- have a temperature over 100.4°, a sore throat, cough, headache, body aches, diarrhea, vomiting or any of these [other symptoms](#).
- have been in close contact with anyone who tested positive for COVID-19.

NOTE: These recommendations are current as of August 12, 2020. The COVID situation continues to evolve and change, and we encourage parents to stay connected to assure most up to date resources and recommendations are followed.



Getting ready to go back to in-person school

- Make sure your child is up to date with all [recommended vaccines](#), especially the annual Influenza (flu) vaccine, when it becomes available. Talk with your child's healthcare provider.
- Practice proper [handwashing techniques](#) at home, especially before and after eating, sneezing, coughing or adjusting a face cover. Help your child understand why it is important.
- Discuss with your child precautions to take at school:
 - Wash and sanitize hands often
 - Maintain physical distance
 - Wear a face covering
 - Avoid sharing objects
- Create a daily routine before and after school such as packing hygiene supplies (e.g. face coverings, hand sanitizer, etc.), washing hands immediately when returning home in the afternoon and washing worn face coverings.
- Practice good [face covering hygiene](#)
 - Have multiple cloth face coverings labeled with your child's name and wash them daily after use. Consider using a lanyard to reduce the chances your child will lose their face covering and send extras, placed in a paper bag. Explain to your child that sharing or swapping face coverings is not ok.
 - [Make your child's face covering fun](#) so your child is excited to wear it.
 - Make sure face coverings fit snugly but comfortably, completely cover nose and mouth, include multiple layers of fabric and allow for breathing without restriction.
 - Practice putting on and taking off the face covering with your child and make sure they understand how it should fit.
 - Have your child practice wearing their face covering for extended periods of time so they get used to it and are ready for long school days.

- Explain the [importance of wearing a face covering](#) and how it protects others from getting sick. (It keeps our germs with us and not shared with others.)
- As a family, model wearing face coverings as recommended by local health authorities or by the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#). Explain to your child why wearing a face covering is important and ok.

Keeping your child healthy at school

- Pack a water bottle labeled with your child's name to ensure your child remains hydrated during the day. Remind your child not to share their water bottle with others.
- Plan ahead for transportation:
 - Contact the school's bus service and make sure you understand any requirements or restrictions with your child using the school bus system.
 - If your child rides the bus, they should sit separately and wear a face covering.
 - If you carpool, every person in the car should wear a face covering for the entire trip.
 - If your school is using the cohort model (i.e. in person schooling and virtual learning combination), consider finding families in your child's cohort to be part of the carpool.
- Make sure all emergency information is current.

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Helpful Resources:

- [Planning for In-Person Classes checklist](#)





Preparing for successful at-home learning

- Create a [daily schedule](#) with your child. Structure and routine are essential for a feeling of safety and success in virtual learning.
- Create a system for your child to earn points or rewards as an incentive for completing tasks on the daily schedule.
- If there are no online physical activities planned by your school, identify a time for family oriented physical activity such as a walk or bike ride. Make sure to take frequent breaks to refuel the body and brain.
- Healthy eating is critical to your child's development. Keep set times for meals and snacks and have [healthy snacks](#) available such as whole fruits, vegetables, grains, and low fat or fat-free dairy.
- [Ample and consistent sleep](#) is needed for proper development and readiness to learn. Elementary students need 9-12 hours of sleep per day; middle and high school students need 8-10 hours per day.
- Keep a calendar or other visual aid to help stay consistent and track assignment deadlines.
- Create a learning space that is free of distractions and clutter. It should be quiet, well lit and comfortable, but appropriate for doing schoolwork. Have your child consistently use this space for all schoolwork and learning.
- If you anticipate technology barriers to learning at home, ask if your school can provide support or assistance to ensure access to learning.
- If you are not able to supervise your child at home every day:
 - Consider forming a group with families in your neighborhood or families whose children attend school with your child. Make arrangements to share supervision and help with homework,

making sure all members of the group follow public health guidelines.

- Check if there are community-based organizations offering daytime supervision for working families (e.g. churches, libraries, etc.). Ask them what they are doing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and if they are following [recommended guidelines](#).

Connecting school and home

- Identify opportunities for your child to connect with peers in a responsible way – either virtually or in person. Peers continue to be an important part of your child's life.
- If your child is not returning to in-person school, encourage them to participate in all live video instruction, if provided.
- Make an effort to connect with your child's teacher at least weekly or more often, if needed.
- If your child participates in the school meal programs, ask your district about plans to make meals available while students are at home.
- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Plan, or receives support services such as Physical, Occupational or Speech Therapy, ask your district how these services will continue if students are learning at home.

Helpful Resources:

- [Planning for Virtual or At-Home Learning checklist](#)



Planning for positive cases

- Identify the school point person to contact if your child gets sick.
- Learn your local testing sites in the event you or your child develop symptoms, or call your local health care provider or public health department.
- Develop a family plan to protect any household members who are at increased risk.
- Know your school's plan for communicating positive cases or exposures while ensuring student privacy.
- Have a plan for possible school closure or quarantine should cases increase or your child be exposed to a positive case.

Addressing emotional challenges

- Talk to your child about how school may look different:
 - Desks separated
 - Everyone wearing masks
 - Teachers maintaining physical distance
 - Eating lunch in classroom
- Ask your school if they are providing support for kids who need it. These may include checks with the school counselor, social emotional learning opportunities and/or support groups.
- If your child receives mental health services, ask your school how these will continue.
- Set aside parent/child time each day to talk about how school is going. [Ask your child questions](#) that lead them to share their feelings and experiences during the day.
- Watch for signs that your child is struggling with stress and anxiety such as being easily irritated, excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, or trouble concentrating.
- Validate that feelings of sadness or anxiety are normal during this unusual time.
- Use the WI Office of Children's Mental Health [Feelings Thermometer](#) to help you and your child measure how you are doing emotionally and what steps you can take to shift your mood when things are getting tough.

Taking care of you as a parent

- Ask for help. Helping your child with homework can be stressful at times. Talk to your child's teacher, school counselor, healthcare provider, friends and family members, or any other trusted person about what can make the situation less stressful.
- [United Way's 2-1-1](#) can assist with things like healthcare, transportation, food, mental health, and so forth.
- Be a role model for your child by practicing self-care:
 - Take breaks
 - Get adequate sleep
 - Exercise
 - Eat well
 - Stay connected to social supports
- Cut yourself some slack. It is more important for your child to have a happy, healthy parent than missing a few lessons. Use daily activities to teach both academic and life lessons, especially with younger children. Remember, you're not alone. Many other parents and children will have some struggles adjusting to school this year.

We will all get through this. Take one day at a time and remember to take care of yourself.

For more information about back-to-school in your community, considering contacting any or all of the following resources:

- Your [school district](#)
- Your [county health department](#)
- 2-1-1 Wisconsin for connection to a variety of non-profit and government services:
 - Dial 2-1-1
 - Text your ZIP code to 898-211
 - Visit [2-1-1 website](#)

For more information on back to school planning, visit the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, or the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#) websites.



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