



4 strategies to help parents address needs of their young child with autism during distance learning

Young children with autism may have a difficult time understanding why they aren't going to see their friends and teacher, and why they have to stay away from their grandparents and other loved ones.

But your staff can help families answer children's questions and ease their concerns.

"Staff have to take on a consultant model and train parents on how to help their children," said Nina Finkler, founder and president of Nina Finkler Autism Consulting LLC in East Windsor, N.J. "They have to speak at their children's level and use strategies to make days as predictable" as days were before the pandemic, she said. "They also have to stay calm. Children with autism feed off the anxiety of other people."

The first step is for parents to develop a new routine so their child knows what to expect each day, Finkler said. Help parents create a visual schedule with pictures or symbols that represent when the child is going to get up, get dressed, do some learning, go outside, eat, exercise, and engage in other activities.

Then teach parents these other strategies to help their young child with autism cope with COVID-19-related changes and learn.

Strategy	Implementation
<p>1. Use social narratives.</p>	<p>Help the student's parents use social narratives with pictures to explain in multiple steps about germs, not knowing when the virus is going to leave and when the student can return to school, and the importance of the student continuing to wash his hands and keep a distance from people not in the house, Finkler said. Encourage the parents to be honest, but developmentally appropriate.</p> <p>If the family was planning to go on a vacation during spring break, the child may need a social narrative about why his family is staying home instead. He may also benefit from an incremental explanation for why mom and dad are home instead of going to work. "Children don't usually see their parents during the day," she said.</p>
<p>2. Establish rules.</p>	<p>Encourage parents to create new rules, Finkler said. For example, if the child's parents are working from home, they can say, "When Daddy is in his office, you can't interrupt him." "It's difficult for children to see their parents in the house," she said. "They expect to be able to interact with them and play with them, so structure is key."</p>

	Post handmade signs, such as a symbol representing the office in a red circle with a line through it. "Children with autism do better when they have rules and things are more predictable," she said.
3. Offer reinforcement.	Recommend parents flood their child with positive reinforcement, Finkler said. If the child successfully stays out of her father's office, for example, they can say, "You did a good job following the rules," she said. Let parents know they can also give their child time to do a preferred activity or enjoy a treat. Just remind them that if the child has a tendency to eat compulsively, they may want to monitor her access to food.
4. Provide resources.	Help parents understand that during this tumultuous time, it is not appropriate to teach their child toilet training, Finkler said. They can, however, focus on other target behavior. If the child was receiving applied behavior analysis therapy before the outbreak, help parents access ABA apps on their laptop or tablet so their child can practice similar skills. "Learning at home will be more meaningful if it's done in a way that is familiar to the child," she said. "Just try to maintain as much consistency as possible."

See also:

- [3 ways to offer students social-emotional support during school closure](#)
- [QUICK TIP: Hold virtual office hours for parent and student questions](#)
- [Tips to provide FAPE during school closures: Lessons from Andrew F.](#)

For more Eye on Autism features, click [here](#).

[Cara Nissman](#) covers autism, school psychology, and IEP team issues for LRP Publications.

April 14, 2020

Copyright 2020© LRP Publications



© LRP Publications. All Rights Reserved.