

Surviving home-schooling

Hints and tips for working
parents with school-age kids



JANUARY 2021

Welcome (back) to home school



WEEK ONE OF HOME-SCHOOLING REDUX IS UNDER OUR BELTS BUT WITH AT LEAST ANOTHER FIVE WEEKS LIKELY FOR MOST OF THE UK, THERE'S A LONG STRETCH AHEAD. THERE ARE DIFFERENCES THIS TIME; AS WE WRITE, UNDER-FIVES ARE STILL ABLE TO GO TO EARLY YEARS SETTINGS IN MANY CASES, PLUS WE'VE ALL LEARNT A LOT FROM THE FIRST TIME ROUND.

HERE ARE OBELISK'S TOP TEN TIPS FOR GETTING THROUGH THE NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS.



#1 Set a routine

Even older children will benefit in the main from some kind of routine, so take some time to organise a rough schedule for working days, taking into account:

- Any online classes provided by school
- Regular work meetings or calls you have arranged
- Meal and snack times
- Time for activities outside school.

Primary-school age children are most likely to miss the reassurance of their normal routine. As well as following a similar schedule to their normal school day, you might also consider mirroring some of the other things they are used to at school, for example pizza on Monday or sport on Wednesday. This will help them adjust more rapidly, both now and when they return to school.

Try as far as possible to keep siblings working at the same time, to avoid distractions and arguments. If they are sharing devices, focus the child without a screen on reading or worksheets. Get into the habit of finishing any schoolwork at a similar time to the normal school day; most young brains need a break by this point.

If you're the sort of family who thrives on routine, you'll find this easy. If you prefer to take things a day at a time, go with the flow but try to keep to a rough time frame that's the same each day, as this will help your children to know what's expected and feel more settled.

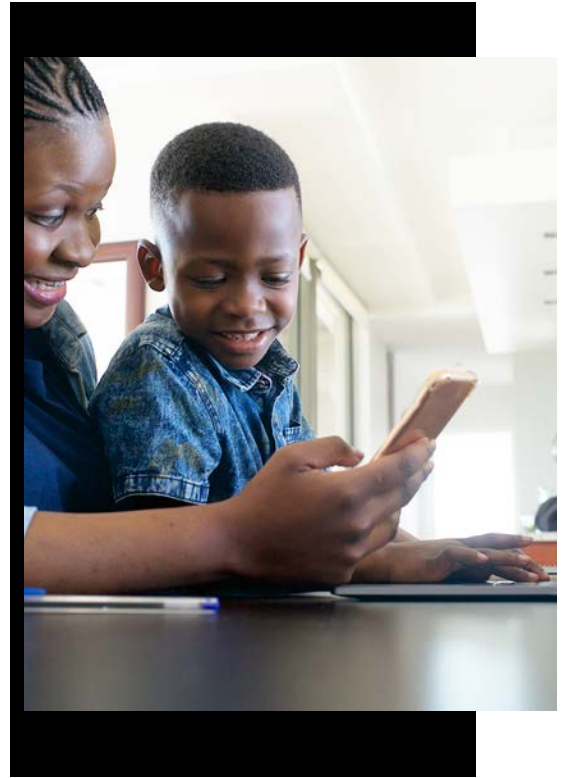
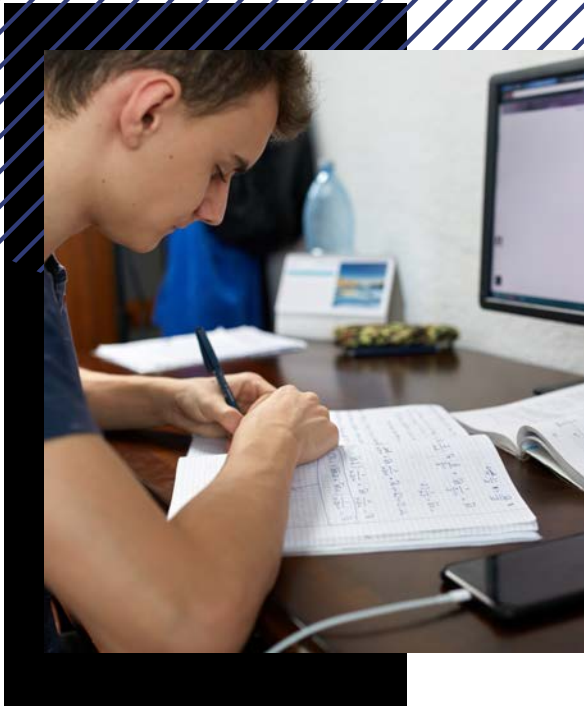


#2 Share out devices

If you can, make sure everyone in the house has what they need to work when they need it. This might mean helping siblings to understand not everyone can have internet or screen-time at the same time; don't be afraid to set boundaries.

If you have lots of live online classes to manage, you might find it helpful to set up a Google Calendar with everyone's classes on it and the links to access them. Similarly, if you need to print out materials, get ahead at the start of each week or each day (if you can). Most schools are open to feedback, so contact your child's teacher to ask about the possibility of receiving materials in advance if possible. If you don't have a printer, don't try to draw out worksheets - just ask your child to write out the answers.





#3 Manage your workspace

Check out the Zoom backgrounds you can download on our website - useful if you want to conceal your kitchen or living room on work calls!

It can be challenging to find space for everyone to work together at the same time. Again, you might have to proactively manage this by specifying who will be where at the start of each week - then there's less room for last-minute disagreements! Try to use the same space for home-schooling each time, so that it becomes associated with study.

If you can, invest in some headphones, so that you can work alongside live online teaching if necessary, or for older children to use to help them concentrate alongside younger siblings. Similarly, Amazon and other retailers have relatively cheap fold-up desks that might be useful to create some extra workspaces around the house that can be packed away at the weekend.

If you have the luxury of options, try to use different spaces throughout the day for different activities, to help everyone feel refreshed. If space is limited, you can get some of the same benefit just by changing seats around the kitchen table for your evening meal.



Activities other than schoolwork are obviously restricted for most of us at the moment, however some of these ideas might help with younger children:

- Arrange Zoom 1:1s with one of your child's friends where they can just chat, do some craft together or, if they still need a bit of supervision, take it in turns with another parent to read to them
- Many activities such as drama and dance classes have moved online, so it might be worth looking at local options in your area
- Audiobooks can be a great alternative to looking at the screen for a while and if your child likes storytelling, they can immerse themselves for a while each afternoon
- Cosmic Kids and similar on YouTube provide a 30 minute or so yoga class that children can do independently.

#4 Make space for downtime

Younger children will not be able to learn for more than 30 to 40 minutes at a time, maybe less depending on the age and preferences of the child. Try to do the bulk of any schoolwork with primary school age children in the morning, when they are feeling more fresh. Schools understand that most parents are not teachers and have other commitments, so if your children are at primary school, don't feel under pressure to go through everything that is provided. For children at secondary school, keeping pace is obviously more important so try to check in at lunchtime to check how they feel they are keeping up and what else they want to achieve in the day.

Make sure you also build in breaks between individual lessons and try to make these screen-free. It's also well-recognised that limiting blue light from screens is helpful in the hours before bedtime, so try to maintain a screen switch-off time with older children. Even if they don't have to get up to go to school the next morning, they still need a good night's sleep.



#5 Get moving

Sadly the weather is not as warm as it was in lockdown one but it's still important to get out of the house and get some fresh air and exercise. Most primary school-age children need at least two breaks outside a day, if not more. Exercise can also help older children, especially if they feel under pressure to keep up with school work. Even a short walk around the block or a burst of star jumps in the garden, if you have one, will keep their energy levels and motivation up (and yours!).

If you're scrabbling for reasons to leave the house, try these ideas:

- Posting letters or pictures to relatives or friends
- Setting an exercise circuit and trying to beat your personal best each day
- Seeing who can spot the most wildlife every morning.

If it really is too cold or wet to leave the house, then try learning a free dance routine from the internet - you never know, you & your family might be the next TikTok sensation!



#6 Chunk up your workload

Try to put in some time at the start of the week to think about what you need to achieve and when. Break work down into sensible smaller chunks that you can parcel out through the day. For example, if you need to concentrate on something, it might be worth getting up a bit earlier to do that before everyone else gets up. Similarly, if there is some more routine work or admin to do, you might be able to do that while supervising a younger child through a live Zoom class.

Encourage older children to take the same approach with their work so that they don't feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to get through each week.

If they are feeling they have too much work, help them find support from their teachers to understand what they should prioritise.

You can also apply this approach to domestic chores: concentrate the decision making involved in feeding the family by coming up with a meal plan for the main meals over the weekend or batch cooking two or three meals in advance.



#7 Share the load

If there are two or more adults in the house then you have the chance to share the work - housework, home-schooling, paid work - as equitably as possible. This doesn't necessarily mean splitting everything 50/50, different households find different ways of working but it's a good idea to have a conversation to make sure you feel you are contributing fairly.

If you are the only adult in charge, you might need to think more creatively. If you haven't already, can you "bubble" with another household for support? Are there friends or relatives who can help via Zoom? An hour of craft or reading with an aunty or uncle, for example, can give both you and your child a break. Similarly, older children could help their younger siblings with schoolwork or help them with an activity occasionally as a break from their own work.

Encourage everyone in the household to pitch in to some degree, even younger children. It will help them to build resilience and confidence to take part in chores and managing their own work, where possible.



#8 Set expectations

First of all, go easy on yourself. Don't make comparisons with others, do what works for you and your family. This really is a time when good enough is good enough. Talk to your children and involve them in decision-making in ways that are age-appropriate, so they understand what's expected of them and also feel they have some control.

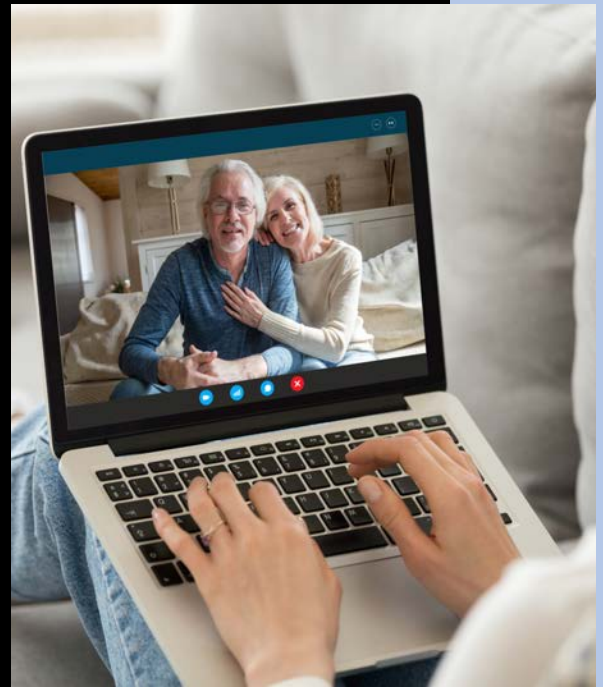
If you feel the expectations from school are unrealistic, then share that feedback with the relevant teachers or heads of year. In the main, schools understand that many parents are working and the last thing they want to do is add to stress levels at home.

At work, check deadlines with your clients or colleagues ahead of time and make sure that they are achievable. Agree deliverables that you feel confident in and flag any potential issues in plenty of time.



#9 Don't forget self-care

"You can't pour from an empty cup" - in other words, if you're depleted then you won't be able to help others. It's really difficult, especially if you are completing paid work early in the mornings or later in the evening but do find some time for yourself each week for something you enjoy. You might even just need some time for an early night or to sit for a short while in silence! Whatever restores you, protect that time to do whatever you want and you will feel rested and more able to keep going.



#10 Ask for help

Home-schooling is tough. Doing it alongside paid work is even tougher. Even though lots of us are doing it, that doesn't make it any easier. So if you need to, ask for help.

Speak to your clients or colleagues if you need to make temporary adjustments to your working habits so you can meet deadlines and pick up the extra work at home.

Get in touch with school if you feel you or your children need extra support. Schools may not be open but teachers and support staff are very much still working, so don't hold back.

Draw on friends and family wherever you can. Whether it's simply to vent, to organise some online teaching with someone that isn't you or to make an hour where you can concentrate and get some work out of the door, even a Zoom meet-up might just save your sanity!



Good luck!

From everyone at the Obelisk Support central team, especially those of us who are home-schooling ourselves at the moment.

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