



These are remarkable times and parents do not need to feel under pressure to replicate school at home. However, there will be challenges in helping students to cope with the confined situation and to achieve some of the school requirements. This is especially so for students with attention difficulties or those with executive functioning problems (ranging from organisation/planning issues, to impulse control and self-monitoring difficulties).

Creating a structure is key and learning opportunities can be created in the home environment to help you to use this time to build on your student's attention and planning skills without placing too many extra demands on the family.

Getting organised

Without the daily structure of school and normal social activities, learning at home will require greater effort from both students and parents to reduce the impact of distractions which sap motivation.

It's likely that your high school student's sleep cycles will shift during isolation, with later sleeping and waking. This is normal in adolescence, so try not to 'correct' it, but create a flexible daily routine around this shift.

- *Within this shifted sleep schedule, encourage good sleep behaviour:* Reducing screen time in the hour before sleep, or the use of mindfulness techniques to wind down.
- Where possible, schedule learning activities at times of greatest alertness, which may be later in the day or even after dinner.

Make a physical planner or timetable, for example an A4 sheet per week stuck to the wall, where your student can clearly mark important dates and activities, and visualise their time-flow across the day and week:

- The schedule should include all the planned activities for the day, not just schoolwork.
- Schedule clear times for breaks/snacks/meals, physical activity outside the house where possible (even just a walk up and down the street or playing ball in the backyard).
- Include times to contact friends and family living elsewhere.

Staying motivated

Don't expect your student to be able to focus for long periods of time to complete tasks. Working in short bursts on small, manageable tasks will help your student maintain motivation and a sense of achievement.

- Have five-minute goals: Break tasks into small, manageable components and check them off as completed.
- Complete two or three goals.
- Have a quick break to reset (use a timer).
- Make clear distinctions between work areas and play zones to help your student get in the right headspace for study. Even if working on their laptop, encourage them to sit in one area for homework/schoolwork, and physically move to another space to use the laptop for games/watching TV shows/social media.
- Where possible encourage your student to self-reward with a preferred activity. Link the reward to the completion of specific tasks.
- Include exercise and relaxation strategies in the plan for each day to maintain mental health, physical health and levels of alertness.

Tips to minimise procrastination

Assist the student to learn the following skills

- **Thought challenging:** Watch for unhelpful thoughts and challenge them – then act.
- **Study grazing:** Start by studying for 10 minutes at a time with a break in between. This will help the student get started and get into the pattern of study, before being ready for longer stretches.
- **Use other people:** Ask a parent or sibling for prompts at various time intervals to stay on track, and/or reward with a snack or activity.
- **Writing drafts:** Start working on a draft. This can be less confronting as it does not have to be perfect.
- **Switch tasks:** If one study task is causing a lot of problems in concentration or difficulty level, leave it for now and move onto a more manageable one.
- **Make a deal with yourself:** Commit to a set study time each day and DO IT. Give yourself a deadline.

Using technology

Many of the suggestions for organisation and maintaining motivation can be achieved by using productivity apps.

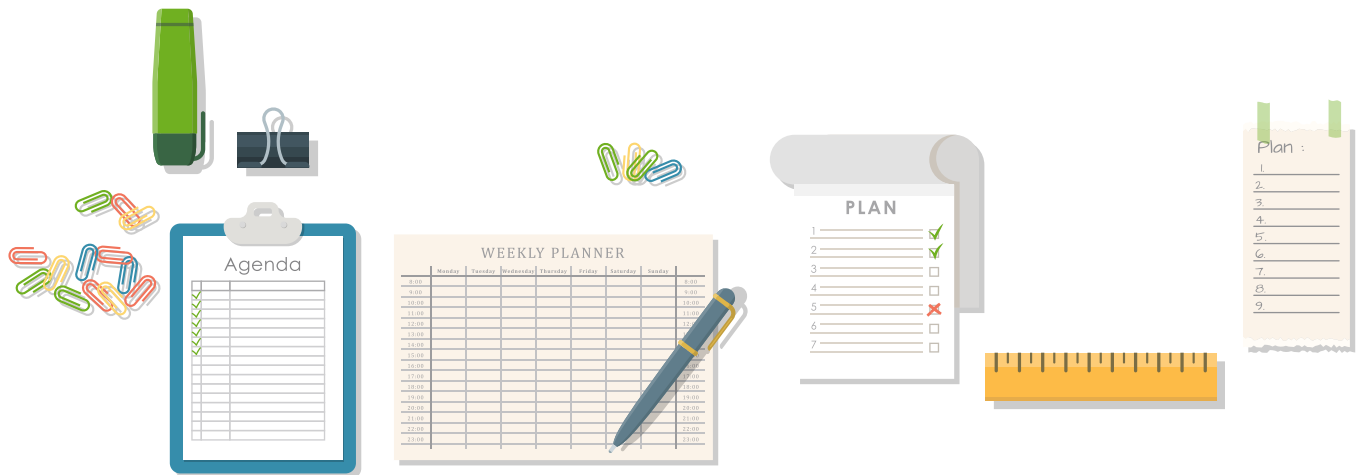
- Checklist apps such as *Wunderlist* and *WorkFlowy* allow your student to keep track of their five-minute goals. *Endnote* or *OneNote* can be used in a similar fashion
- *Google Calendar* or similar calendar apps can be used to make printable weekly schedules.
- A gamified timer app such as *Forest* may help keep your student on track – focusing on a task for a specified period of time is rewarded by the visual of a growing tree.

Reducing impulsivity and aiding self-monitoring

The unusual situation and removal of normal routines is likely to impact on your student's capacity to self-monitor and contain impulsivity.

- A daily routine as described above will be essential in scaffolding your student and enabling them to better manage impulsivity.
- Remind your student to check over any work for errors they may have missed.
- Encourage them to write a list of 'common mistakes' for each subject. They can use this to help them to watch out for these errors and correct them as needed.





- Editing of written work can be managed by taking a three step, colour-coded approach:
 - First stage (green pen) check spelling
 - Second stage (red pen) check grammar
 - Third stage (blue pen) check content. They should ask themselves: Have you answered the question? Have you followed the correct structure? Does the writing make sense?
- Download some structured checklist forms to use for planning, note taking, error checking, and editing.

Setting realistic goals and anticipating roadblocks

- Make sure that expectations are realistic. Don't expect the student to do too much at once.
- Set goals for each task.
- Encourage them to write a list of potential roadblocks and to problem solve these in advance. *For example*, a distraction roadblock might be problem solved by:
 - Working in a clear and quiet space which minimises potential distractions.
 - Turning off their phone and email when working.
 - Allocating a specific time/s each day when the student decides they are allowed to check phone messages and email and respond. It is important to stay connected with friends, but this needs to be managed.
 - Setting an alarm so that they don't get too absorbed when responding to messages.

The APS has other information sheets in this series to support children and teens with learning difficulties and disabilities. To access, visit: psychology.org.au for more.

Helpful references

- Meltzer, L. (2010). *Promoting executive functioning in the classroom*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2012). *Smart but Scattered Teens*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2018). *Executive skills in children & adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and intervention*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Acknowledgments

This resource was prepared by the:






A clinical neuropsychologist is a psychologist who is trained to understand brain-behaviour relationships (across the lifespan):

- To assess thinking/brain abilities and difficulties to clarify diagnosis and identify the client's care needs and priorities
- To provide targeted intervention or rehabilitation for people with thinking/brain-related difficulties or disorders
- To adapt or modify treatments to take into account the effects of thinking/brain difficulties

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