



Supporting Parents/Caregivers of Students with High Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Welcome to this resource guide. It is meant to be helpful by providing guidance, tools, and resources to parents/caregivers of children with high needs in order to support your efforts to engage your child in continued educational opportunities during this challenging time.

<u>RESOURCE DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>GETTING STARTED</u>	<u>3</u>
Some Functional Tips	5
Self-Care for the Parent/Caregiver	5
Setting Up the Environment for Continued Educational Opportunities at Home	6
COMMUNICATION SKILLS (Coming Soon!)	
Social Skills	
Expressive/Receptive Vocabulary	
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)	
LITERACY (Coming Soon!)	
Shared Reading	
Access to Books	
Word Identification and Decoding	
Alphabet and Phonological Awareness	
Comprehension	
Writing	
MATH (Coming Soon!)	
Computation	
Access	
Activities	
SCIENCE/SOCIAL STUDIES/CURRENT EVENTS (Coming Soon!)	
Science	
Social Studies	
Current Events	

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY/MOBILITY (Coming Soon!)

Physical Activity

Mobility

LIFE SKILLS/SELF-HELP SKILLS

8

ART

10

SENSORY ACTIVITIES (Coming Soon!)

PLAY AND LEISURE (Coming Soon!)

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this guide is to provide parents and caregivers of students with high needs guidance, tools, and resources to help support your efforts to engage your child/young adult in continued educational opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The RESC Alliance has coordinated with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), and the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities (CAPSEF) to assemble online resources. A wealth of information and resources have been provided to assist with navigating continued educational opportunities for students with and without disabilities. Yet, we recognize that some students have significant challenges accessing distance learning in these more conventional methods. There are students who are unable to sit in front of a computer screen to access learning. Some students require a hands-on, life skill embedded method of instruction. These resources were designed with that population of students in mind.

These resources have been organized into ten different topical categories and are meant to assist parents/caregivers in navigating the world of continued educational opportunities. These resources are not meant as a substitute for the work families and district personnel have developed as a team, but as a supplemental resource to assist with developing engaging activities for students throughout the day. Throughout this time please know that the RESC Alliance, CSDE, CPAC, and CAPSEF have been working to support families and educators as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important for you to know that information and the health conditions within our state are changing rapidly. As such, please understand that the information that we share at this point in time will need to be updated frequently as new information becomes available.



Getting Started For Parents/Caregivers of Students with High Needs During COVID-19

GETTING STARTED FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS OF STUDENTS WITH HIGH NEEDS

Supporting continued educational opportunities for students during the COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge for any parent/caregiver; however, it is of particular challenge for students who have high needs. Communication with school-based teams, the creation of schedules/routines, and setting of expectations are of utmost importance.

SOME FUNCTIONAL TIPS

It will be essential to be in frequent contact and communication with your child's school-based team. Communicate your priorities and your schedule to them. Work with them to determine the best ways to support and engage your child in continued educational opportunities.

- Practice your own self-care (see "[Self-Care for the Parent/Caregiver](#)").
- Talk to your child about illness and COVID-19 (see the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) or the [National Association of School Psychologists \(NASP\)](#) for additional information and resources).
- Set up your environment for success (see "[Setting up the Environment](#)").
- Communicate frequently with your child's school-based team ([tips here](#)).
- Create routines and schedules, but be flexible about them (see "[Setting up the Environment](#)").
- Establish behavior expectations for your child.
- Remember that learning can be fun - everyday activities have many learning activities embedded within them - cooking is science and math, yard work teaches about nature and can inspire crafts, and reading together enriches vocabulary and listening.
- Be kind to yourself—Remember, no one was prepared for this. Feeling anxious, fearful or worried are normal reactions to this crisis situation. Do what you can...pick your battles and excuse the messy rooms and even how much screen time your child might have - though you want to be sure that your children are practicing safe online behavior.

Once you have established your routines and schedules, start looking at supporting your child's continued educational opportunities within the academic content sections of this resource. Remember to start slowly with this academic content; we hope the resources included in this guide will assist families with identifying natural learning opportunities for your child during daily life as well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Visit the Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Special Education [“Special Education Guidance and Resources for COVID-19”](#) for more information.
2. Excellent [list of visual supports for teaching about COVID-19](#) (including visuals and videos) and [here as well](#).
3. [Social Story about COVID-19](#).
4. [Example of Lesson Pix visual support for germs and handwashing](#).
5. [School Health series of videos](#) on working with exceptional individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Tips from the [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#).
7. [4 Distance Learning tips](#) and [8 tips for getting started](#).
8. [Parent Resource Site](#) (with videos) from CREC River Street Outreach Program.
9. And remember to have fun!

SELF-CARE FOR THE PARENT/CAREGIVER

It is critical for parents and caregivers to take care of themselves, especially those with students with high needs. During a time of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, self-care becomes all the more important. Parents and caregivers need to take care of themselves, so that they can be strong, supportive caregivers to their loved ones. Each and every one of us experienced the increased stress of juggling multiple roles in our home environment. This is magnified if you have a family member who requires extensive supervision and engagement.

PUTTING SELF-CARE INTO PRACTICE

There are many dimensions of self-care. The six most common include:

- Physical self-care (e.g, sleep, nutrition, rest)
- Emotional self-care (e.g., stress management, compassion)
- Personal self-care (e.g., hobbies, identity)
- Social self-care (e.g, support systems, positive social media)
- Spiritual self-care (e.g., time alone, meditation)
- Practical self-care (e.g., space, finances, work)

Given the challenges that we are all under, especially parents of children with high needs, it is important to at least pick some of these elements of self-care to participate in daily. Try to choose one or two elements a day to practice, even if it is only for 5-10 minutes each. Make sure to reach out to your support network during these times as well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [Introduction to self-care and self-care starter plan.](#)
2. [Tips from Psychology Today.](#)
3. [Blog post about functional self-care tips.](#)
4. [Dimensions of wellness.](#)
5. From Rethink - [Self-Care for Caregivers.](#)
6. [Self-Care as Essential to Caregivers.](#)
7. [Ideas for de-stressing with your family.](#)
8. [CDC Stress and Coping Tips.](#)
9. [Supporting Families During COVID-19 - The Child Mind Institute.](#)
 - a. [Sign up for their daily tips.](#)

SETTING UP THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CONTINUED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AT HOME

While enriching activities can be provided throughout activities of daily living, it is also important for students with high needs to have an organized place dedicated to completing academic work. This helps to set the stage for completing academic activities, if appropriate for your child. Also, it will be very helpful to determine a schedule, and stick to it as much as possible - but be flexible if it cannot be followed to its fullest. Your school-based team may have provided you with a schedule that you can use. And if you need help, they might be able to assist you.

PUTTING SETTING UP THE ENVIRONMENT INTO PRACTICE

Here are some practical tips to set up your environment for learning:

1. Create an organized physical workspace in your home if appropriate. This should be a unique space designated for learning. Consider the accommodations that your child receives at school - does your child need a distraction-free environment? A standing desk? A bouncy chair? Look at [these ideas](#) as well.
2. Make a daily or weekly schedule. Share this schedule with your school-based team. Work with your school-based team to determine what educational priorities that you all have for your child and then decide how to infuse those priorities into your day.
 - a. [Check out these examples of weekly schedules](#), by grade level, with supports from the Nebraska Department of Education. [Here is an example](#) of a schedule completed for a student and [this link](#) has a template to use for a weekly schedule.
3. Use visual schedules for your full daily schedule (between activities) and during activities (within-activities) to help independence and motivation.
 - a. This is [a great resource](#) to get you started, or talk to your school team. Here [is a video](#) of how to use a visual schedule. When creating daily schedules, make sure to include sensory breaks (link to sensory) throughout the day as needed. Consult with your school team, particularly Occupational Therapists, to determine what types of breaks will be appropriate and when.
 - b. Try a [first/then board](#) to assist your child with completing non-preferred tasks. Here is a [link to a video](#) describing first/then boards.
 - c. A [token board](#) can also be a helpful tool to motivate your child to complete work or reach a goal. Here is a [video example](#).
 - d. Work with your school team to determine if they can provide visual supports such as schedules, first/then boards and token boards to you via mail or to be picked up at school.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [Hands in Autism](#) from the Indiana School of Medicine has some functional resources and templates for creating visual supports.

2. [Lesson Pix](#) is a relatively inexpensive online program for creating visual supports with many pre-made templates available.
3. [Boardmaker Online](#) has extended its free trial for 90-days and has a wealth of premade schedules and curricular materials.
4. [Pre-Made Visual Supports](#) and [here as well](#).
5. [Curated list of teaching tools including visual supports that are pre-made](#).

Communication Skills

COMING SOON!



Literacy

COMING SOON!

Math

COMING SOON!

Science/Social Studies/Current Events

COMING SOON!



Physical Activity/Mobility

COMING SOON!



Life Skills/Self-Help Skills

LIFE SKILLS SUPPORTS

Life skills are functional skills or tasks that develop independence, self-esteem, and increase the likelihood that a person will be successful across multiple environments. Supporting and creating opportunities for children to practice life skills during the COVID-19 pandemic can be both challenging for any parent/caregiver, as well as helpful! Engaging in life skills activities promote self-control, positive thinking, and organizational habits. Any skill that will help a child succeed in life is a life skill. It is also important to include executive function skills (i.e. organizing, planning, prioritizing, decision making) throughout your child's daily activities when possible. Collaboration and communication with school-based teams, creating a routine that incorporates life skills, and setting expectations are crucial, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PUTTING LIFE SKILLS SUPPORTS INTO PRACTICE

It is essential to collaborate and communicate with your child's school-based team on a frequent basis. This will provide feedback to the team, which they can then specifically provide you with different techniques, prompts, materials, procedures, etc.

You can incorporate different sets of skills throughout different activities. For example, have "chores" scheduled into your child's daily schedule. Having your child perform this task also relieves you, the parent/caregiver, of certain tasks depending on their independence.

Life Skills Checklist

- Health and Safety Skills (following signs, pedestrian safety, asking for directions, etc.)
- Career Path Skills (creating a resume, job specific skills, etc.)
- Self-Determination/Advocacy (polite refusal, requesting help, attempting new tasks, etc.)
- Socialization (peer relationships, social communication, basic greetings, etc.)
- Community Participation (handling money, creating a list, navigating a store/town, etc.)
- Transportation (walking, cycling, driving, taking public transportation, etc.)
- Home Living Skills (vacuuming, washing dishes, laundry, etc.)
- Self-Regulation (sensory integration, taking a break, etc.)

Remember, start engaging your child in being independent with their life skills tasks slowly. To make it easy on both yourself and your child, start with one task together. When they are struggling with a certain task, they can ask you for help. Asking for help promotes self-advocacy. Strengthening their organizational and planning skills will ensure their independence in future tasks, such as grocery shopping or completing a morning routine, without requiring an adult in close proximity.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Here are great videos showing “How To Do” Certain Tasks.
 - a. [Cross the Street](#)
 - b. [Get the Mail](#)
2. [Life Skills and Autism](#): A web page describing and providing information about life skills for people with Autism.
3. ["What Do You Say?"](#): This is a free, social communication app.
4. [How to Teach Kitchen Safety Skills for Teens with Autism](#).
5. This link provides guidance through [Life Skills Tasks](#) and also provides other resources related.
6. The [Conover Company](#) also provides a free trial to their functional skills system.

Art

ARTS AND CRAFTS SUPPORTS

Art encompasses all of the developmental domains in child development. It is important for students of all backgrounds and ability to experiment with art in all forms. These resources will provide tutorials, experiences, and experimentation of the arts in a variety of mediums and techniques. During times of stress and change, students of all abilities and in all stages of development may need additional support for their emotional needs. Art making provides intellectual stimulation, soothing sensory experiences, and much needed fun!

PUTTING ARTS AND CRAFTS SUPPORTS INTO PRACTICE

Students with disabilities should experiment with different mediums of art through the senses to begin. Some might have sensory sensitivities and may not like the feeling or smell or certain materials. Introducing individuals to a few mediums initially will help to get an idea of what they most like to work with and that will help find ideas that can broaden artistic skill. [This video](#) lists what to avoid, as well as what you will need to simplify and create meaningful art lessons.

Once your child has a feeling of the materials and how to safely use them, they can begin to experiment with simple coloring and painting (hands or brush). Some may not have the ability to hold a brush or may not have access to a brush. There are many substitutes if there is no access to a paint brush, such as q-tips, sponges, cloth, cardboard, fingers, etc. Examples for brush substitutes can be found in [this link](#).

Your child should experiment with two to three different mediums available in the home. If there is no paint, coffee or tea can be used for paint, or different foods can be used to create color and pigment. Some different ways to create a paint-like substitute can be found in [this link](#).

Some individuals may require hand over hand, which means guiding a student by holding his or her hand while they hold an object. This will help them in the initial stages of creating art. It is also important to have students ask or point to what they want, such as materials, colors, shapes, etc. This will help improve communication skills and engagement.

Once the initial introduction of materials is complete, we are ready to create! Start simple with lines and shapes, and then work your way up to pictures, if possible. Let the individual guide you in the right direction of creativity and artistic needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Oak Hill Arts Studio](#): Free YouTube videos with art instruction for students with special needs. Hosted by Oak Hill School.

- [Kinderart blog.](#)
- [Compilation of art supports for students with special needs.](#)
- [Suggestions for art activities.](#)
- [Art projects for children with special needs.](#)
- [Crayola art video of the week.](#)
- [Handout - 52 weeks of projects.](#)
- Supplies
 - If you would like to purchase art materials but are unsure where to begin, here is a list of suggested art supplies, which can be found at local stores and online:
 - [Dollar Tree](#)- Offers online ordering and delivery.
 - [Jerry's Artarama](#)- Retailer in West Hartford, CT offers online ordering and delivery.
 - 1 sketch pad
 - 1 pack of markers
 - 1 set of watercolor paints
 - Paint brushes- try ones with thin handles and thick handles
 - Air-dry clay (Crayola makes an easy to use one that comes in a tub)
 - Play-dough
 - 1 set of regular pencils
 - 1 package of construction paper
 - 1 package of tissue paper
 - 1 package food coloring
 - 1 bottle of liquid dish soap (Dawn is best for making bubble solution)

Sensory Activities

COMING SOON!



Play and Leisure

COMING SOON!

