

## Continuity of Learning: Guidelines for Families and Guardians of Students in Grades 6-12

### Continuity of Learning

In his [March 26, 2020 Directive Number 5](#), Governor Scott directed schools to close and supervisory unions and districts (SUs/SDs) to transition to Continuity of Learning for the remainder of the school year. Continuity of Learning (CoL) means districts will be required to provide education services and related supports to all students remotely so that student learning and academic progress is achieved during this time. Though this will look different in various households, parents, families and caregivers can play an important role in setting routines and encouraging student learning at home. Since all families are unique, they can support their children in a variety of ways. This support can take on different forms and should reflect what is best for each family.

The following guidelines are designed to help families and at-home caregivers navigate this new challenge.

### The Role of Families/Guardians in Supporting Remote Learning

*Home-based learning is unique and should not try to recreate school.* Attempting to support school-like learning in a home setting may frustrate families and students. Families are encouraged to take cues from their teenager's teachers to help facilitate remote learning. In addition, families can support continuity of learning for their teens by doing the following:

- **Set Limits Around Screen Time:** While it is true that students will need to spend time in front of a screen in order to engage in remote learning, families should limit prolonged amounts of uninterrupted screen time. Encourage teenagers to take breaks by standing up, moving around, and using other resources (such as paper and pencil) to complete assignments, when possible.
- **Take Advantage of Analog Resources:** Teens should be encouraged to use writing utensils and paper to maintain penmanship and written computation skills. When possible, assignments could be printed for students to complete by hand, freeing up devices and bandwidth for other family members.
- **Provide an Environment that Supports Remote Learning:** Assist your teen in creating a dedicated space to do their school work, free from distractions if possible. Develop a daily routine that maintains a sense of normalcy, such as getting dressed for school and eating a healthy breakfast.
- **Minimize Feelings of Isolation:** Encourage your teen to find safe and healthy ways to connect with friends and family. Make use of technological platforms, such as Zoom or Facetime, to interact virtually. This time could also be used to write letters, make phone calls, and find connections to the community.

- **Monitor Your Teen’s Use of Technology and Social Media:** As teens take cues from adults, be mindful to model responsible use of technology.
  - Prolonged exposure to social media and other news outlets can lead to increased feelings of anxiety; pay attention to the types of media your teens are consuming and how it might be affecting them.
  - Promote [safe and healthy behavior online](#); a virtual learning environment is not free from cyber bullying and online predators.
  - Remind teens not to open messages from users that they do not know; help your teens utilize critical thinking skills when evaluating the validity of sources, senders, and information.
  - Keep your virus, spyware, and firewall protections up-to-date.
- **Emphasize Active, Experiential Learning:** Families should encourage their teens to engage in activities that are creative, experiential, project-based, and keep them moving. Physical activity is essential for concentration, learning, mental and physical wellbeing, and positive interactions with others.
- **Recognize the Value of Developing Transferable Skills:** Being at home during this time is an opportunity for teens to develop independence, flexibility, problem solving, digital citizenship, and communication skills as they take on increased responsibility for their learning as well as within their family.

## The Importance of Developing a Schedule

While at home, it is recommended that families develop a daily schedule to provide structure. The following are some suggestions to help develop your schedule:

- Collaborate with your teenager on developing a schedule. Post the schedule and stick with it. These are unprecedented and stressful times, however, so it is important to be flexible about making changes.
- Honor the expected timeframes established by teachers to the best of your family’s and teenager’s abilities.
- Eliminate extended blocks of time spent in front of a screen and without movement.
- Teenagers need to be mindful of the needs of other family members in regard to schedules, internet and device use, etc. Below is a table of suggested amounts of dedicated academic time.

Grade Level	Minimum	Maximum	Recommended Length of Sustained Attention
6-8	Class: 15 minutes/day Total: 90 minutes/day	Class: 30 minutes/day Total: 180 minutes/day	1 subject area or class
9-12	Class: 20 minutes/day Total: 120 minutes/day	Class: 45 minutes/day Total: 270 minutes/day	1 subject area or class

[Remote Learning Recommendations During Covid-19](#), p. 17

- Wide Open School has provided an [interactive daily schedule](#). Here is another [sample schedule](#), developed by educator Moritza Termin, with links to activities.

Remember that this learning environment is temporary. Do your best and be patient with yourself and your family; boredom is often the precursor to creativity and innovation.

## **Social and Emotional Support for the Entire Family**

### **Supports for Adolescents**

- Listen to your teen(s). Stay calm, offer reassurance, and use their questions to guide the conversation. Responses should be honest, accurate, and age appropriate. Dispel rumors that could be inaccurate or fear-inducing.
- Younger teens may be more vocal about asking questions about their safety and may need help separating reality from rumor or fantasy; assure them about the steps community leaders are taking to keep everyone safe. For older teens, it is appropriate to discuss the situation in more detail. Refer your teenagers to sources of factual information and allow them to help the family make decisions about scheduling, chores, etc.
- Be a role model by focusing on the positive.
- Demonstrate stress-reducing techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and meditation.
- Be aware of risk factors that could lead to increased anxiety, such as pre-existing mental health problems, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Notice changes in your adolescent's behavior, such as sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, withdrawal from social situations, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

For more information, visit [Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19](#).

### **Supports for the Family**

- Engage in family activities such as board games, cooking, and crafting.
- Take the opportunity to explore the outdoors.
- Identify projects that might help others. Write letters to neighbors or others that might be stuck at home alone. Create art, sing, or read to one another.
- Stay connected and maintain relationships. Isolation is a new concept for families and students. Find ways to break down the barriers of isolation and keep track of how your family is doing.
- Be ready to discuss conflicts and set guidelines for how to resolve problems that arise due to tight quarters and limited time for personal space.
- Be patient with yourself and each other. These are unprecedented times; we are all in this together.

## The Importance of Self Care for the Caregiver(s)

- Monitor your own use of social media and checking the news, which can increase anxiety.
- Practice the same deep breathing, relaxation, and anxiety-releasing techniques that you are sharing with your teenagers.
- Stay connected with your teenagers' school(s).
- Find ways to decompress and take breaks; this may mean that you will have to work as a team to schedule time for personal care.

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety:

- Dial or text 911.
- Reach out to the Mental Health [Crisis Text Line](#) - Text VT to 741741 and a trained counselor will respond within five minutes
- Call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255. Trained helpers are available 24/7.
- For more information visit the [Vermont Department of Health's Suicide Prevention page](#).

## Good News

Educators from across the country and the world are collaborating like never before to support our adolescents. We are learning from each other in our efforts to keep them on course to graduate during this unprecedented time. Educational materials and digital learning platforms are being made available free of cost to provide ways to keep our students engaged. Although these are definitely uncertain times, it is heartwarming to see how people across the country, and the world, are rising to meet this challenge in a positive way.

## Resources

### Internet Access

As families look for ways to support their children at home, whether academically or socially, the internet can be an invaluable resource. As the demand for both internet access and available data has increased rapidly, many providers have responded with special offers. The offerings vary from free internet to unlimited data. Check with your local provider for offerings, or [The Federal Communications Commission](#), which has a list of companies and organizations that have signed the Keep Americans Connected Pledge.

### Partnership with PBS

Vermont Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and the Agency of Education (AOE) are partnering to support continuity of learning for our students and school communities. This partnership will provide access to free educational programming resources via television broadcasts. Additional resources will be provided by the AOE and Vermont PBS, both on-air and online.

The curriculum-supported programming is aligned to national standards and includes interactive lessons and suggested activities. Programming for PreK-8 has begun on the PBS main channel which is broadly available throughout the state and does not require cable. PBS Plus (WGBH) has also begun airing educational programming for grades 6-12 during the noon to 5 PM timeslot.

### **Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative**

The Vermont Agency of Education will be scaling its existing relationship with Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative (VTVLC) to provide an optional online system to schools that will provide access to curated and standards-based curriculum and instruction for English language arts, social studies, math, science and health/PE to support continuity of learning for our students and school communities. This is targeted to serve secondary students beginning at grade 6 for the remainder of the school year. This option will be at no cost to schools or families.