

Grades 7-9: Tips for Supporting Learning at Home

How do grade 7-9 students learn?

Students in this grade range are experiencing one of the most tumultuous times of their lives: adolescence. There are many important psychological developments happening for students at this age, including:

- Forming individual identity and values
- Learning skills to be independent and productive
- Establishing emotional independence from parents
- Developing sexuality and gender-based social roles
- Building more mature relationships with peers

There are also numerous biological changes occurring during this time that affect learning. At this point, your child's brain is only 80 percent of the way to maturity. The frontal lobe, which mediates our judgments, abstract reasoning, impulse control and decision-making is not yet fully developed.

That's part of why an important part of learning during adolescence is developing self-regulation skills. Self-regulation is the act of managing attitudes, feelings and behaviors to enable goal-directed actions necessary for success in school, relationships and the workplace. For students in grades 7-9, there is a significant increase in strategic planning, abstract thinking and goal-directed behavior. However, they still lack the skills to organize information efficiently, monitor their own behavior and consider long-term consequences. Accordingly, you might notice a discrepancy between what your child *knows* and what they *do*. Helping children learn to apply their knowledge is a key goal of education for these grades.

How can parents best support grade 7-9 students?

There are many things parents can do to [support their children](#) during this time. But first, remember — you can't do it all! Pick the strategies that work best for you and your family, and don't worry if some things fall by the wayside.

- Support their organizational skills. Help your child manage materials and school supplies. Create homework bins, checklists, clearly posted schedules and a clean, distraction-free workspace. Help them manage time by providing reasonable and consistent routines, setting up a visual display (watch, clock or calendar), creating lists and teaching them how

to generate outlines. Spend time with your child practicing planning for upcoming tasks, while rewarding and praising them for their successes.

- Create a framework for learning. Right now, it's unrealistic to expect that your child will complete a full school day following a rigid schedule, but you can still offer some guidance. Provide your child with a reasonable schedule for getting work done in clearly defined periods.
- Collaborate with teachers. Schools are providing very different levels of service right now, from virtual instruction to the delivery of worksheets. Keep in mind that most teachers have not done this before; they are genuinely trying to figure out how to help kids learn remotely as well. If you can, it's a good idea to ask teachers for help when necessary and brainstorm ways to make remote learning work best for your child. Also, consider asking the teacher how much you should be checking and correcting your child's work and clarifying what assignments should take priority. Do not forget to tell teachers about success stories so that those can be shared with the larger community.
- Provide opportunities outside of learning. Encourage your child to build in breaks and times for socializing, exercising and enjoying entertainment. The idea is to do a session of work first and then build in a reward with a pleasurable activity.
- Help them get a good night's sleep. Teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep per night. However, most teens get 7 hours or fewer. [Not getting enough sleep](#) can affect your child's mood, as well as cognitive functions including attention, memory and processing speed. Some strategies that can help include:
 - Create a sleep schedule to wake up and go to bed at about the same time on school nights and non-school nights.
 - Encourage your child not to sleep in on the weekends to "catch up" on sleep.
 - Allow them to nap for 15-20 minutes in the early afternoon but avoid longer naps.
 - Make the 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime a quiet or wind-down time. Shut off all electronic devices.
 - Help them create a sleep-friendly physical environment that is comfortable, cool, quiet and dark.

What's the best schedule for grade 7-9 students?

There's no right answer here — it's important to be realistic about what you and your family can manage. That said, seventh through ninth graders will benefit from having a daily schedule that is developed collaboratively with their parents. This schedule can be roughly similar to the structure provided in the classroom and can include time for physical activities, creative projects and check-ins with friends as well as more traditional academic activities.

It probably won't be realistic to cover all of the same academic material that your child would have in school, but you can still build in time for all the general subject areas that they would ordinarily have been studying. For these grades, the content that's usually emphasized includes:

- English Language Arts (ELA): Students at this age are usually learning to bring together knowledge and ideas from multiple texts and form their own interpretations of information.
- Math: The math curriculum for these grades varies, but it often includes equations, functions, geometry, statistics and probability.
- History/Social Studies: Finding key ideas, using evidence effectively, and supporting conclusions are especially important in grades 7-9.
- Science: Students in grades 7-9 are often focusing on drawing inferences from data and analyzing information.
- World Languages: Many students are gaining basic skills in a foreign language at this time.

It's often helpful to alternate subjects your child enjoys with those that they feel less enthusiastic about. In general, focusing for about 30-45 minutes at a time works best for this age group, though that may be too long for some children. Because children in these grades often have different school schedules on different days of the week, they may also be able to handle a more flexible schedule that varies based on the day.

How can parents support the mental and emotional health of grade 7-9 students?

Under these stressful circumstances, your child's [mental health and emotional needs](#) are just as important as their academic learning.

- Practice mindfulness. To engage your child in [mindfulness activities](#), start by sharing why mindfulness is worth trying. You might share your own experiences with stress management. Once you've got your child's buy-in, mindfulness activities may include short breathing exercises and guided meditations. Or you can try more active mindfulness activities such as mindful gardening, directed painting or simple yoga poses.
- Validate their emotions. When children feel heard and understood, they are more likely to be receptive to feedback and suggestions. It's only natural for the current unprecedented situation to give rise to a range of emotions, such as anxiety, [disappointment about cancelled events](#) or loneliness. When your child expresses feelings like these, be sure to let them know that their response is normal and that you're taking their emotions seriously.
- Encourage socialization, routines and healthy habits. The stress and lack of structure stemming from the current situation can make it easy to fall into habits that feel good in

the moment but can be detrimental in the long term. Encourage your child to eat properly (most of the time), get enough sleep (but not too much), and maintain a balanced routine (including productive and non-productive time). It may be especially frustrating for your child to not be able to see their friends — a deep need to connect, belong and fit in is a big part of early adolescence. Along with validating their feelings, be direct with them about ways to make the situation more bearable. This may look like loosening rules for time spent on social media and helping them brainstorm creative new ways to socialize with their friends.

- Schedule teletherapy sessions if things are becoming difficult. Watch out for signs that your child may need more support for their social and emotional health. If they're experiencing challenges that you're not sure how to help with, considering [seeking out the support of a therapist providing remote sessions](#).

What can parents do to manage pushback from grade 7-9 students?

Often, pushback can be a sign that your child doesn't have a clear understanding of the expectations for a particular situation. This leads to a mismatch between the story your adolescent has rehearsed in their head and the one you've rehearsed in your head. To head off conflict, it's important to be clear about what your child is expected to accomplish during remote learning.

Part of setting clear expectations is outlining consequences in advance as much as possible. Keep in mind that consequences do not have to be "bigger" in order to be more effective — even a small consequence (like losing extra screen time for one evening) can be motivating, so long as you reliably enforce it.

Just as important is to work with your child to give them ownership and a sense of control over their environment during this uncertain time. Involving your child in making decisions — like setting a realistic schedule for getting work done, deciding where work gets done, and choosing personal goals to work toward — can make them more willing to follow your rules.