Helpful Tips for Maximizing Student Engagement during Distal Learning

Follow a Daily Schedule
- Schedules provide structure and predictability, which increases feelings of safety and security
- Children are more willing to follow a schedule when they have the chance to give input
    - Allow the child to add activities to the schedule and decide when to do certain tasks
    - Consider allowing the child to make one reasonable switch to the schedule each day
- Include daily living activities (preparing meals, caring for pets, laundry, cleaning, etc.) as well as leisure and recreational activities (exercise, art, music, games, projects, etc.) on the schedule
    - Remember that this is an opportunity to include children in some of the tasks they normally do not get to participate in during the day because they are at school!
- We all look forward to certain times of the day more than other times, be sure to alternate between preferred and non-preferred tasks on the schedule
    - Consider adding breaks or free choice time to the schedule immediately following challenging or highly non-preferred tasks
- Enforce the schedule!
    - Refer to the schedule and have children check off or cross out completed tasks before moving on to the next activity
    - Use When/Then statements to redirect children who try to deviate from the schedule (*"When you finish 15 minutes of reading, then you can choose a game to play"*)

Organize the Environment
- Set your child up for success by making sure that the physical space:
    - Includes all necessary materials and supplies for completing school work
    - Is free from distractions (tv, cell phones, siblings, busy with movement or loud noises)
- Consider flexible seating options to increase your child's interest and engagement
    - Read on the couch, beanbag, or curled up in a blanket; bring their work to a table outside; have them lay on their stomach on the floor; allow them to stand at a countertop, etc.

Work for Reasonable Amounts of Time
- The brain is a muscle that, like other muscles in our bodies, tires from repeated use
    - Childhood development experts generally say that a reasonable attention span to expect of a child is 2-3 minutes per year of their age
- Research shows that taking frequent breaks is good for your productivity and your focus
    - Do not underestimate the power of physical activity! Research shows that increased physical activity leads to improvements in academic achievement and behavior.
    - Brain Break videos on YouTube and Go Noodle are great ways to provide a short, structured movement break for your child
- Consider using timers to help children see how long they need to work before taking a break, as well as to help them see how much time they have left on a break before returning back to work
    - Use transition warnings to let your child know what is coming up next (*"In one minute we will put the markers away and take out your Science packet"*)

Provide "Just Right" Support

- Planning, organization, and initiation are important executive function skills for children to develop
  - While some children may require more support than others, all children can participate to some extent in the process of gathering their assignments, organizing their materials, making a plan of attack, and getting started on tasks
- Rather than sitting with your child while they do their work, monitor their progress from a distance
  - You can model good work habits by quietly working on your own task nearby
  - Some children may require more support than others. After telling and showing your child how to do something, step away and let them try it on their own. They may need a visual model or list of steps to help them remember what to do.
  - Some children also need help with time management. If your child is wasting time or avoiding their work, use logical consequences to motivate them (*"You have 15 minutes left on your schedule to get this worksheet done. Remember, if you complete all of your school work today then you get to watch 30 minutes of tv tonight."*)
- Check-in with your child as needed
  - Recognize and acknowledge their effort, even if they are struggling
  - When they get stuck, rather than just giving them the missing information or telling them the correct answer, model problem solving skills (*"Hmm, where could we look to find out?"*) and guide them toward the tools they need to access in order to do the work themself
  - When you notice signs of anxiety or frustration, encourage positive coping skills by prompting them to ask for help or take a short break

Allow your Child to Earn Privileges for Meeting Expectations

- Research shows that children and adolescents are much more likely do what is expected when they have the power to earn something, rather than when being threatened with taking something away
- Research also shows that when we tie rewards to meeting specific behavior criteria or performance standards, the child's interest in tasks and performance on tasks are enhanced
  - Note that rewards and incentives are not necessary for tasks that a child already has a high interest in or is able to perform well independently
- Your child can earn access to privileges by completing any number of contingencies, just be sure to decide what the expectations are up front, explain them to your child, and stick to them!
  - After completing one highly non-preferred task
  - For staying seated at the table for 15 minutes
  - After completing all of their school work for the day... or for the whole week
  - For remembering to use nice words and a safe body with their siblings all day

Be Flexible and Follow your Child's Lead

- Children are naturally curious about the world around them and learn through exploration and play
- Build in opportunities during the day for your child to make their own decisions about what to play and how to play, as well as opportunities for your child to work on personal projects
- When your child shows interest in a particular topic or activity, follow their lead!
  - Expose them to additional resources and materials on the topic
  - Expand on their ideas by encouraging questioning, discussion, and experimentation