

The Balancing Act

First and foremost, the balance for any family will look different for every family. In this case, Pinterest may be your enemy!

There is no perfect learning environment. You don't have to rush out and buy desks and school equipment for every child. If you have the means and that will make your child happier learning at home, that's great. But children are resilient, and just need a place that suits them to dedicate to learning.

<https://housemethod.com/blog/how-to-create-a-learning-environment-in-the-home/>

Older Teen

My 16-year-old is a very independent learner. His desk area has been outfitted with a more comfortable chair that keeps the desk height suitable for working, and insures his wrists are in a proper placement for more typing. He now has a whiteboard to track, each day, what is due, and what times he must be "live" in a meeting. I can check this at a glance and keep him on track. What many parents do not realize is the most of the learning management systems (Google Classroom, Canvas, Schoology) have ways teachers can provide parent access so you can actually see what is in the online classroom, and what needs to be done. If your school has not offered this...ask!

<https://childmind.org/article/grade-10-12-tips-for-supporting-learning-at-home/>

Child with learning differences

My 13-year-old is not an independent learner and is easily distracted. He needs many scheduled breaks and constant monitoring. For him, the kitchen table is the best choice. He can see the family working, but is in a bright, warm, familiar environment where I can always see what he is doing. A simple rolling cart with all his classroom supplies helps keep him organized, and makes him feel that he has a special learning environment, too! He'll need more attention, so I went to my state's education website to look for parent resources.

<https://sites.google.com/dpi.nc.gov/remote-learning-resources/home/parent-resources?authuser=0>

Most states will have something like this –although most of what is at the link above is helpful in any state. Middle schoolers require more intervention that you think, owing to the fact that the constant changes they go through physically and psychologically make them a different kid every day, sometimes. Now my son has an IEP, so I have printed it out, and asked his new teacher specific questions about how this will work in the hybrid or online environment. This takes a bit of patience as special education professionals are scrambling to determine how they can best implement IEPs and support students who don't come to school every day, but they will have a plan –so ask!

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-ways-transition-iep-goals-remote-learning>

The Balancing Act

Elementary Age

My youngest is 8. She chose to do remote instead of hybrid because she feels safest that way right now. So for her, the learning environment I set up is all about comfort and feeling good about learning. She has a desk in her playroom. NO, that will not work for every kid. It's usually best if you have the desk, or table set up free of distractions. But my daughter loves to learn, and is not easily distracted. We chose her playroom because it gives her quiet, but is near where I am working at home, and has glass doors so she can see me. She is surrounded by things she loves, and it makes her happy to do school in there.

<https://www.waterford.org/resources/how-to-create-an-at-home-learning-space/>

The most important thing is to remember that learning at home is not perfect. Even with the best planned learning space, students who become frustrated or tired may need to grab their book or laptop and set up on a porch for a few minutes. Learning in outdoor spaces, when available, can be a nice break and refresh a child working from home. Outside time is critical for keeping their physical and mental stamina. There are many physical education sites that can give you ideas about how to keep kids healthy and active at home during this time:

<https://www.thepespecialist.com/peathome/>

If you cannot get outside, there are scores of active videos on YouTube to take a break with kids and dance, or add movement, or even kid focused yoga. Here are a few we love:

Brain Breaks: <https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/brain-breaks-for-kids>

Go Noodle: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2YBT7HYqCbbvzu3kKZ3wnw>

Cosmic Kids Yoga: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

The most important thing is balance. Take breaks. Do something active in between learning activities. Set a schedule for kids and the parent/older sibling who is managing the day. Have some fun. Eat lunch together if possible. And remember that this is temporary. The tone set by the adults will filter to the students. So make the learning day as personalized and comfortable as possible –there is no perfect way to do this, but the way that suits your family best!