



## The Impact of COVID-19 on School Attendance Problems: Our Response

The following information has been developed by the International Network for School Attendance (INSA). It is intended for school staff who support students with a school attendance problem.

Whether students understand this pandemic as COVID-19 or the coronavirus or just another flu, they know it has changed 'life at school', and for some students it will have changed the way they think and feel about school.

The [International Network for School Attendance \(INSA\)](#) is a network organized to promote school attendance and respond to school attendance problems worldwide. Its members continue to be available to support all students and school leadership. INSA acknowledges cultural and environmental differences affecting schools and school attendance. It recognizes that education professionals have creative capacities to foster continued learning wherever the child is cared for, including at home. Essential for learning are participation, engagement, and anxiety management<sup>1</sup>. Other central elements include instilling routines, discipline, meaningful activities, and establishing ways for students to remain committed to their education.

We know there is a developmental necessity for children to continue to have quality educational experiences, even though their school may be closed. ***School is not out: it is only different.*** It is important to help students understand this is a 'new normal' for many children.

Some children will still miss learning during this 'new normal' for two reasons: (1) they are in under-resourced families or communities (low socio-economic status; minority groups; homeless; refugees; indigenous; those experiencing domestic violence, abuse, and neglect); (2) they are enrolled in educational programs where they ordinarily receive additional support, and they are not used to school-related work at home.

We know that long periods away from school lead to a widening of the difference between those in poverty and those in other income brackets<sup>2,3</sup>. This gap is likely to widen through this pandemic, which means our resources should be focused on ensuring those in poverty have most access to materials and services that support their learning while at home.

For some students, additional time at home is pleasant. For instance, students who displayed school refusal or social anxiety may finally feel less 'out of step' with their peers. However,

extended periods of school closure may make school return more difficult as social connections wane and doing school-work becomes unfamiliar. For other students, going to school serves as a welcome routine in their lives, and staying away from school is a disruption. We know there is a lot of stress, guilt, and tension in families as a result, even in families which usually function well. For parents of anxious kids, the temptation can be to just do the homework for their kids; that temptation/pressure has only increased. But parent should know they have not lost the permission to continue to advocate to their school for supports.

It is likely to be most helpful to your child if the role of parent and caregiver is to serve as a Coping Coach. This means helping your child identify when stuck, or supporting them to get through hard portions of academic work by remaining engaged and active. For some students, especially extroverted children, they may experience loneliness, need contact with others, and may experience withdrawal behaviors after weeks of limited contact. For this, we suggest setting up a *buddy system* to ensure they have at least one person with whom to talk. Socializing face-to-face with one friend at a time and limiting social contact to the same small group of friends may also limit risk of infection. Of course, local government guidance about social spacing / physical distancing must be followed.

With increased screen/online time, social exclusion and cyberbullying can rise. Parents are well-advised to establish limits to screen time and to monitor their child's experience of screen time. Students with discipline problems and indifference towards school may experience boredom. An increase in the variety of tasks and careful dosing of task difficulty can be important.

School leadership should provide guidance to parents regarding the complementary or collaborative role of parents as partners. Together, with supportive resources and while keeping students safe, parents and schools have a role to support children with learning difficulties and mental health problems too. We know that counselling support (e.g., social workers, psychologists) are making themselves available via online services, also at reduced costs.

In these days, the teacher-student interactions matter more than ever. Teachers are in the best position to know which students need extra follow-up and care. We have to trust them. It is a good time to learn more about our students and understand how to respond to their needs, collaboratively.

Many students around the world are participating in eLearning or some form of remote schooling. Some have sick parents as an added stressor while they attempt to keep up academically. The teachers have worked hard the past few weeks to learn new online solutions, and in many cases, it has proven successful.

Our INSA website ([www.insa.network](http://www.insa.network)) will continue to share resources on how to provide care and support to students with school attendance problems. These resources may help during the current time of social spacing, and when the transition to 'old normal' takes place. For many students, a return to school will be a welcome sign of normality, however there may be a rise in the number of students who have difficulty returning to school, demanding our collective attention.

## Relevant Readings

1. Fornander, M. (2020). The Conversation on ways to help kids relax as the virus upends everyday life: <https://theconversation.com/4-ways-to-help-kids-relax-as-the-coronavirus-upends-everyday-life-133873>
2. Kuhfeld, M. (2019). Surprising new evidence on summer learning loss. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 101, 25–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721719871560>
3. Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Allen, A. B. (2010). Extending the school day or school year: A systematic review of research (1985-2009). *Review of Educational Research*, 80, 401–436. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0034654310377086>

## Websites

### English language

- Present and accounted for? Coronavirus-related school closures create attendance challenges. <https://www.educationdive.com/news/present-and-accounted-for-closures-create-attendance-challenges/574412/>
- Learn@Home. <https://learnathome.withyoutube.com/>
- Tips For Homeschooling During Coronavirus. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/23/820228206/6-tips-for-homeschooling-during-coronavirus>
- Supporting children and young people with worries about COVID-19. [https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19\\_advice-for-parents-and-carers\\_20.3\\_.pdf](https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf)
- Meadows Center offers videos to help children amid the COVID19 pandemic. Here is one: Helping your kid with...practice reading at home <https://www.meadowscenter.org/library/resource/helping-your-kid-with>

### Danish language

- Information til forældre om børn og corona-bekymringer. <https://psy.au.dk/cebu/>

### Dutch language

- Wat moet je doen als je bang bent voor corona? <https://jeugdjournaal.nl/artikel/2329474-wat-moet-je-doen-als-je-bang-bent-voor-corona.html>
- Animatievideo over corona speciaal voor kinderen in het Nederlands. <https://www.universiteit leiden.nl/nieuws/2020/04/animatievideo-over-de-coronacrisis-speciaal-voor-kinderen>

### French language

- Comprendre et soigner le refus scolaire anxieux. <https://www.dunod.com/sciences-humaines-et-sociales/comprendre-et-soigner-refus-scolaire-anxieux-psychotherapie-phobie>
- Resources for teachers / des ressources pour aider les enseignants dans la continuité pédagogique pendant le confinement. <https://etreprof.fr/>