

# keeping learning going...

---

how can we create a great classroom  
environment in our home for primary students?

---



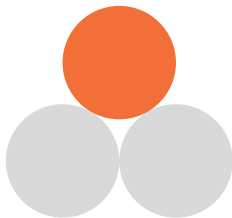
# why is this important?

It's pretty impressive to watch a teacher set up their classroom at the start of each term. They select tables that are just the right height for their students, and make sure that the chairs are the most ergonomically friendly the school can afford. They write up posters and put signs around the room, often putting double borders of coloured paper around them. They think about how they are going to co-design their class values so that they can be laminated and posted on the walls. They have the IT staff pop by to make sure that the WIFI is as fast as it can be. They have been to conferences to learn about how to use their learning environment. They've read books on it. They've sat in university lectures about it!

And most importantly they've fine tuned their approach over years.

And now as parents, it is your turn, and it can be frustrating, daunting and confusing to try to get this right. You can't recreate school in your kitchen, but you can make some relatively quick and easy tweaks for your children to foster their learning. In this toolkit we share some of them with you.

## key ideas in this kit



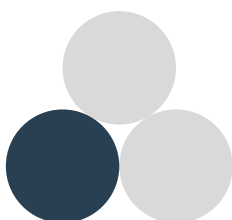
### the physical environment

Ideas to help you get the learning space right without blowing the bank or another trip to OfficeWorks.



### the digital environment

Keeping your children safe and happy while they surf the World Wide Web.



### staying happy and healthy

Getting through the next few months as a united team, despite the increase in board game arguments.

# the physical environment

## reflection

Many of us have had to rapidly repurpose our homes to become learning environments for our children (and sometimes offices for ourselves!). What are some physical changes you have already made to provide a good learning environment for your children? What is worrying you about this environment?

What are some physical changes you have already made to provide a good learning environment for your children? What is worrying you about this environment?

## tools

There are a couple of key things you can do to ensure you maintain energy and momentum when designing and delivering lessons.

- **The table:** Does your child have a suitable desk that they can work at? At best, it is their own table or desk that is at the right height for them. If this is not possible then try to at least give them their own table space where they can work independently without knocking elbows with you or with their siblings!
- **The chair:** Does your child have a chair that is the right height? Ideally it should be a chair that doesn't become uncomfortable too quickly, but that isn't so comfortable it sends them off to sleep! At the very least try to use a dining chair with some thick books to get to the right height and a cushion!
- **The resources:** Talk to your child's teacher about the resources that they will need across a week or the term (like pens, pencils, a calculator, craft supplies). Once you've gathered the resources successfully, put them all in a box or a bag in a central space so that your kids aren't heading off on an expedition every time they need to get something!

# the structure of a great remote lesson

- **The learning zones:** Our little ones in particular need more learning spaces than just a table and chair. If you are lucky, you can set up learning zones around the house, but if you have a smaller place you can still get creative. Perhaps consider a story time chair, a thinking mat, a call zone (for when they need to connect by phone or video with their teacher) and a chill out space for when they need a brain break.
- **In the room:** Light, noise and temperature all matter. So try to set your child up in an area where there is natural light during the day (ideally not blazing onto them and giving them sunburn!), or at least with adequate lighting so they can read. If possible try to keep the room cool enough that they stay focused (hot rooms make kids sleepy), but not so cold they catch a chill!
- **The home as a classroom:** The kitchen is a mathematics wonderland, the garden a biology laboratory. A walk around the block is a social studies lesson, the movement of the sun through the home is an art class, nighttime is an astronomy extravaganza. As a parent get creative, and share your ideas with your teacher so they can incorporate them into their lesson plans too!
- **The distractions:** Homes can be interruption factories that can quickly derail your child's focus. If you are working from home, your video calls will distract them. Someone opening the fridge will too. The TV will take their attention off their learning. So will the radio. Or their sibling who is on a group chat next to them. So as best as you can, try to keep the learning area focused and distraction free. If the space is noisy or full of distractions consider getting some headphones for your child and playing some quiet (instrumental) music or try scheduling some quiet learning times with a stopwatch and alarm where everyone in the house agrees to be quiet.

## **action**

If you were to improve three things today about your child's learning environment what would they be?

# the digital environment

## reflection

Many students in Australia now have access to a device and they are learning online. This has opened up a world of opportunity, but also a universe of distractions.

Take a moment to reflect on what you think the biggest distractions are for your children when they are using a device, and then check in with them to see if your assumptions are right!

## tools

More than likely, your household's regular 'screen time' quotas will blow out when children are learning remotely. Despite this, how can you have your children learning effectively through their device and being safe while they do it?

- **Reducing poor digital choices:** There is a handy rule of thumb that children make poor digital choices when they are faced with the 'toxic trio' of boredom, bedrooms and darkness. So whilst you can't be supervising them for every moment of every day, where possible try to ensure that devices are turned off in the evenings and are used out in the open.
- **Come up with a family agreement:** Co-designing digital rules as a family is great practice. You can all set rules on when and where technology is used, on when and where it isn't (ie. at the dinner table, in bedrooms, etc), on how much time can be spent gaming each day, or which social media platforms are acceptable. As hard as it can be, try to model this yourself by sticking to the rules in front of your children! Bill Gates of Microsoft is reported to have only had one computer in his house, and it was in the main living area! We love the resources at <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents>, they are well worth a look.

# the digital environment

- **Cyber-bullying:** Unfortunately, just as it does in the playground, kids will be kids and bullying can occur online. If your child is grumpy or upset after being online, there is a chance that they have had some mean posts, comments or messages directed at them, or they have been left out of activities they wanted to be involved in. Turning off the internet or banning our children from social media may feel like something you want to do, but sometimes this can exacerbate the problem and make them feel even more isolated. We would recommend that the first port of call should be your child's teacher, and we also highly recommend the online program run by our friends over at Project Rockit <https://www.projectrockit.com.au/online/>.
- **Ensuring your child can access technology:** Unfortunately, not every family in Australia can access a device for each of their children. Whilst there are plenty of resources that your teacher can share with you that don't need a computer, we would advise you to see if you can secure something for them. If you are struggling, reach out to your teacher as they may be able to loan one from school, or there may be programs run by your school to secure these tools for your family. It's also worth reaching out to your teacher to check which online platforms they will need (eg. Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom) and then checking that your child can access these.

## **action**

Set aside a time to talk with your child about your family's digital values and rules during this time of remote learning. If you come up with an agreement, put it somewhere prominent (like the fridge) and make it easy to see. You could even set some rewards if the agreement is kept to by all!

# happy and healthy kids

## reflection

When your children are learning remotely you need to acknowledge that it simply isn't the same as school. Lessons won't be as professional as those that their awesome teachers usually deliver. Your kids will miss their friends, something that isn't helped by social distancing.

Maybe check in with your kids at dinner one time this week to see what they love about learning at home, and what they are missing about school.

## tools

So what can you do to support your children to be happy and healthy while learning from home?

- **Give them time with their friends:** Just as you want to hang out with your friends (and some of your family) during this time, your kids want to be able to catch up with their mates, too. So consider giving them time for supervised video calls with a group of their friends. It might also be time to rekindle the old pen-pal concept and have your children send through updates and maybe even physical postcards or letters to their buddies.
- **Taking breaks:** Recess, lunch and after-school playtime are built into school timetables for a reason; they give kids a break from school and allow them to play, be creative and stretch their legs. So encourage your children to have good breaks at set times during the day, and not use them playing games online, but instead going outside to get some fresh air, burn some calories and get a short hit of vitamin D. Of course, you might want to give them some gaming time too.
- **Enjoying this time:** As teachers and parents ourselves, we know that teaching children is hard work and that you may be juggling your own job at the same time. As best you can though, try to enjoy this, and think, 'What would my 80 year old self tell me to do with this time with my children?'

# happy and healthy kids

- **Family quiet time:** Learning remotely is hard work, there is no denying that. Give your whole family time to chill out, and give those brains a break. The easiest way to do this is through meditation, and we think our friends over at Smiling Mind <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/> have the best resources to help you here.
- **Stay healthy together:** Take the time to get healthy together, setting some fitness goals and setting aside time as a family to do them. This could be morning yoga (maybe on Centr.com for the adults and Cosmic Kids for the younger ones!). Also consider making dinner together as a teachable moment, and have your children take part in the menu design and cooking.



## action

What is a new habit you can form (and keep) during this time to stay healthy and happy as a family and keep learning together?



**thank you for all you do to educate our children**

**the EC crew**



**education  
changemakers**

**professional learning +  
support that changes schools**

Education Changemakers is an organisation founded by teachers, for teachers. We have a range of resources you can draw on from podcasts to videos, and books to workshops. If you would like to read more about how we may be able to partner with your school, head on over to [educationchangemakers.com](https://educationchangemakers.com).