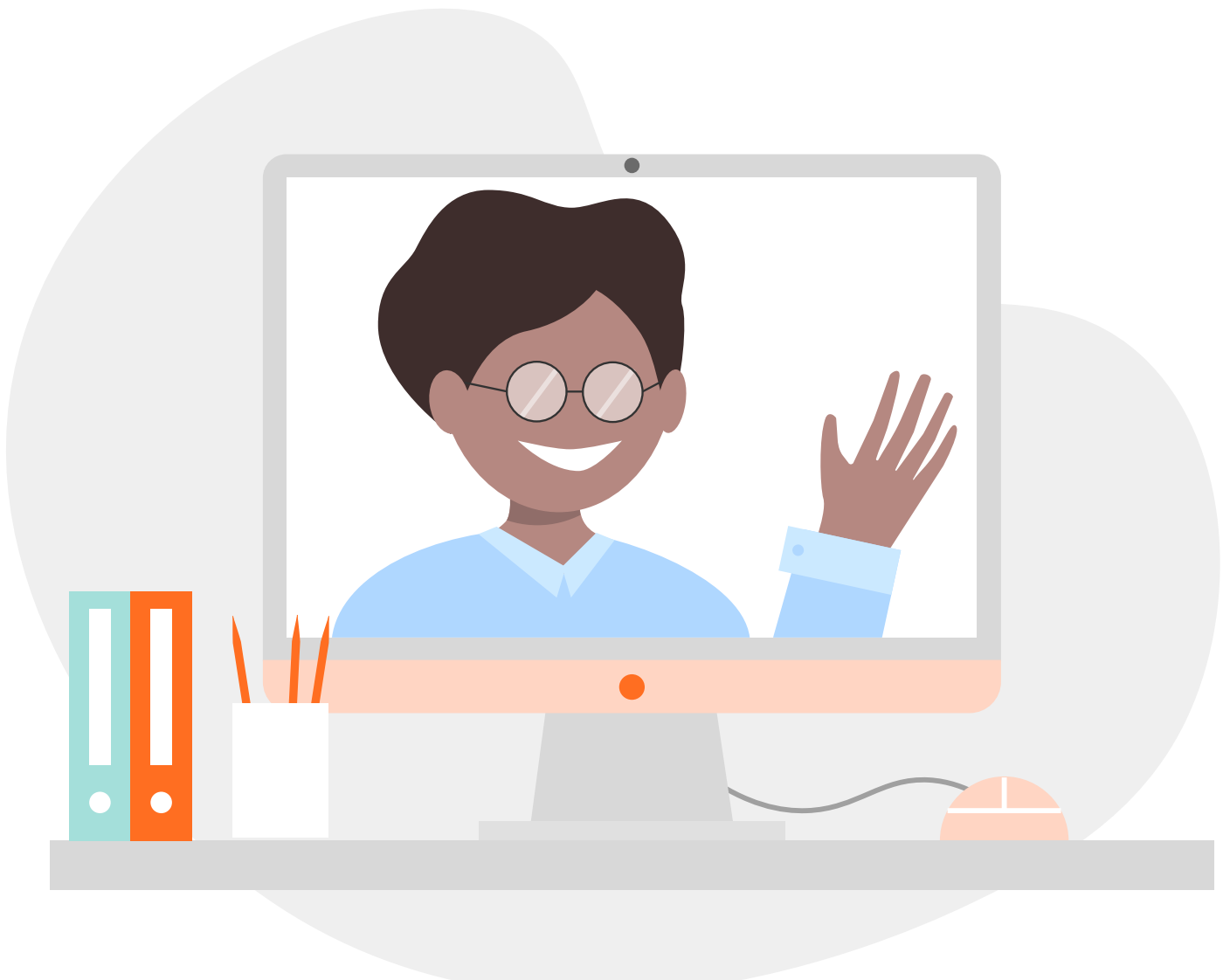


keeping learning going...

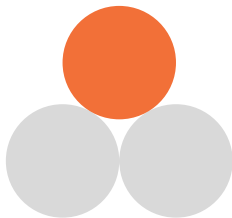
how can we create a great classroom
environment in our home for secondary students?



why is this important?

The average high school today is a hive of learning, with practical lessons taking place in customised learning spaces, students engaging online with their peers and teachers across multiple online platforms, and carefully planned lessons designed to foster engagement and practical learning. Whilst moving to a remote classroom environment takes some of these options off the table, there is still a huge amount of learning that can be happening in the home. There are a few things that we can do as parents to foster a physical learning environment that keeps our teenagers focused and moving through content and challenges that their teacher has assigned.

key ideas in this kit



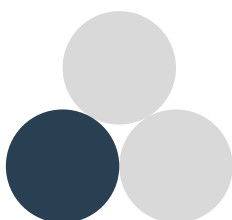
the physical environment

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



the digital environment

Keeping your teens 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

Secondary school has changed quite a lot since we were teenagers! Technology is now drawn on throughout the day, and students switch easily between engaging with content and self-directing their efforts to achieve tasks.

Why not take a moment to check in with your teenager to see what regular life is like at school, and how it differs from your experience.

tools

What are the physical things you can ensure you have organised for your teenager to foster their remote learning?

- **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 their siblings (or even you!) getting in their hair and distracting them.
- **The chair:** Does your child have a chair they can sit on 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! The best case scenario is an office chair that is easily adjusted.
- **The resources:** Talk to your teenager about the resources that they will need, and encourage them to have these in one location ready to go. What you don't want is for every trip to get a calculator to turn into a 20 minute expedition to their bedroom, visiting the fridge on their way back to the table. Instead have a box or bag of their learning resources that can be packed away each night.

the physical environment

- **The learning zones:** Sitting at one chair and desk all day is no way to learn. So talk with your teenager about learning zones. If they are reading a text for English, mark out a reading chair. Or if they are doing something hands on, can they use the kitchen? Is there a yoga mat rolled out on the floor for meditations and rapid jumping-jack brain breaks?
- **In the room:** Light, noise and temperature all matter. So try to set your teenager up in an area where there is natural light during the day (ideally not blazing onto them and giving them sunburn!), or at least adequate lighting so they can read. If possible try to keep the room cool enough that they stay focused (hot rooms make us all 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 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!
- **Distractions:** Homes can be interruption factories that can quickly derail your teenager's focus. If you are working from home, your video calls will distract them. Someone opening the fridge and offering everyone a yoghurt 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 them and playing some quiet (instrumental) music, or at least scheduling quiet learning times that everyone agrees to.

action

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

the digital environment

reflection

Many teenagers 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 teenagers 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 teenagers are learning remotely, but despite this, how can you have your kids learning effectively through their device and be safe while they do it?

- **Reducing Poor Digital Choices:** There is a handy rule of thumb that teenagers 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.
- **Coming 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, when and where it isn't (ie. at the dinner table, in bedrooms, etc), how much time can be spent gaming each day, and which social media platforms are acceptable (don't forget there are a lot more of them than Facebook and Instagram!). As hard as it can be, try to model this yourself by sticking to the rules in front of your kids! 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>, and would encourage you to head on over there and take a look. They have a wealth of resources on some really sticky subjects like online pornography, meeting people online and inappropriate content.

the digital environment

- **Cyber-bullying and safety:** Just like at school, bullying can occur online, and unfortunately reports show that the worst age for this is 14. If your teenager is grumpy or upset after being online, there may be 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 adolescents 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 their teacher, and we also highly recommend the online program run by our friends over at Project Rokit.
- **Ensuring your teenager can access technology:** 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. For teenagers, a basic tablet device may suffice, but a laptop is probably ideal. If you are struggling to access a device for each of your teenagers, reach out to your teacher as they may be able to loan one from school, or there might 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).

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 teenagers

reflection

When your teenagers 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. They will miss their friends (or the people they are dating), 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 and lunch are built into school timetables for a reason, they give kids a break from school and allow them to stretch their legs. So encourage your kids 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.

happy and healthy teenagers

- **Enjoy this time:** As teachers and parents ourselves we know that supporting the learning of teenagers 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 family?'
- **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 like morning yoga (maybe on Chris Hemsworth's Centr.com). If you don't already share the responsibility for cooking with your teenagers, allocate them one night a week to plan, prepare and make dinner for the family. They'll take great pride in turning a bunch of ingredients into something the family enjoys together!

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.