



Big Life Journal

Back-to-School Care Package

Tips, ideas, and tools for parents and children
for returning to school, homeschool,
or anything in between.

COPYRIGHT 2020 BIG LIFE JOURNAL
BIGLIFEJOURNAL.COM

Things I can control...

Choosing a learning arrangement that works for all family members

Involving my children in creating a fun learning space at home

Information I choose to receive

Teaching my children precautions

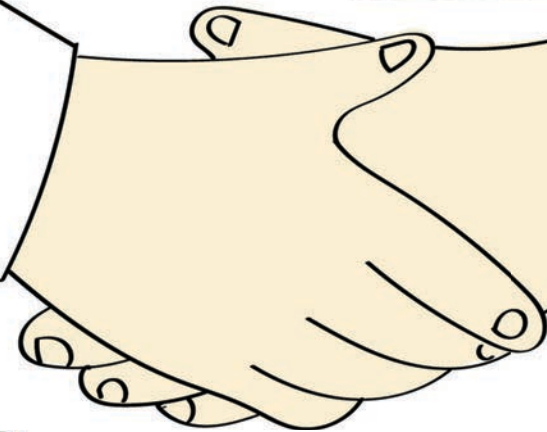
Choosing nourishing, healthy foods, staying hydrated, and getting some sleep

Joining community groups, learning pods, etc. to get the support I need

What I do with my free time

Taking precautions for myself

Finding creative ways to "see" friends and family



Let it go...

When the school district makes their decision about going in-person, remote, or hybrid

My gym, yoga, or Zumba studio being closed

Actions and beliefs of those around me

Not being able to see friends and loved ones in person

My favorite restaurant being closed for dine-in

If I get sick (even those who have followed guidelines can get sick)

Having to work from home

If my children get frustrated or upset about our schooling decision

How much free time I have

If another quarantine wave hits

Focus on The Senses 5,4,3,2,1

- Find 5 things you can see.
- Find 4 things you can touch.
- Find 3 things you can hear.
- Find 2 things you can smell.
- Find 1 thing you can taste.

Embrace The Arts

- Color or draw.
- Look through recipes.
- Listen to a calming playlist.
- Play an instrument.
- Sing.

Move

- Take a walk.
- Do a few yoga poses.
- Jump on a trampoline.
- Run in place.

Connect to Nature

- Go outside and walk barefoot through the grass.
- Sit outside in a relaxed lotus position: legs crossed, hands with palms open on knees.
Do slow, deep breathing.

Nurture

- Water plants.
- Clip dead leaves.
- Gather seeds for growing or sharing.
- Pick flowers.
- If you have a garden, pick fruits or veggies or weed.

Calming Strategies for Adults

Control The Environment to Calm The Senses

- Turn down the lights for a few minutes.
- Turn on soothing music or sounds.
- Light a scented candle; watch the flame.
- Wrap yourself like a burrito in a regular or weighted blanket.
- Drink ice water or go warm with hot tea.
- Give yourself a mini hand massage with a fragrant lotion.

Connect with the Animal Kingdom

- Watch fish in an aquarium.
- Do bird watching.
- Pet your furry family members.
- Fill bird feeders and see who comes to the seed buffet.
- Take a few minutes with a journal outside and track the creatures you observe.

Encourage Successful Time Management for Your Child

Often what stands between goal completion and the starting point are time management issues. Throw a pandemic in the mix and virtually schooling your child, and things have moved to top-level chaos. There's hope in the form of a reliable and reasonable schedule. Learn how to manage precious time and help children get from point A to B with ease.

Schedule in Time for Health and Wellness

- Add snack time and lunchtime, not just for the children but for yourself as well.
- Schedule in breaks and use a timer to keep on track. Use the time for mental breaks and other mindful activities.
- Schedule "me time." Free time allows each family member to invest in their passion, experience enjoyment, or relax.

Be Realistic

- Start and end your day with realistic goals for the period.
- Some schools are providing classes at specified times, so start with them and fill in the spaces.
- Add all activities to the calendar.
- Maintain boundaries and don't give up personal time for unwinding.

Manage Time with Calendars

- Use online calendars like Google's to help the entire family connect.
- Use a whiteboard and add space for a monthly, weekly, and daily schedule.
- An old-fashioned calendar can track upcoming assignments, projects, and events.

Use Alarms

- Calendars provide notifications alerting you of upcoming events.
- Make sure alarms are not on mute or loud enough.
- Use specific sounds for specific events.

Avoid the Schoolwork Blues:

How to Keep Kids MOTIVATED!

Physical Motivation

- Make sure their basic needs are met. Are they sleepy, thirsty, or hungry?
- Are they comfortable? Are there itchy tags on their clothes, shoes too tight, or hair in their face?
- Do they have the right supplies they need and do they know how to use them? Compasses and rulers can be tricky, so can a mechanical pencil with lead that keeps disappearing.

Fun Motivation

- Give choices whenever possible, especially in choosing a research topic.
- Allow various modalities to show knowledge of a subject. Let them create a poster of the Battle of Fort Sumter. Help them memorize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and record them reciting it.
- Assign fun, special projects to work on after daily work is complete. Keep the project in a separate place away from regular school work.

Mental Motivation

- Do they know what the expectations are?
- Do they understand the directions?
- If they seem bored, can they move up to the next level?
- Are they overwhelmed? Can small groups of problems be completed in increments of time rather than a full page?

Self Motivation

- Track milestones on projects to help keep your child motivated and excited about their progress.
- Model doing more so your child can see the pleasure in reaching potential.
- Watch motivating films together. Who didn't want to take on a challenge after seeing "Rocky"?
- Find motivating quotes from your child's personal heroes or people they admire to read together.

Help Your Child Combat Loneliness and Feel Connected

For families quarantining and social distancing, it's important to look for opportunities allowing children to enjoy meaningful interactions with others.

For Younger Children

- Write or draw pictures to pen pals.
- Write or draw pictures for neighbors.
- Write messages for the neighborhood on the driveway in chalk.
- Hang signs and/or make cards for delivery people, including the mail carrier.
- Call or connect online with family members.
- Look through family photo albums.
- Create silly videos to send family and friends.
- Take part in the Original Flat Stanley Project.
- Does your child miss visiting the local pizza joint? Have them write a letter to the restaurant.
- Have Zoom playdates with their friends. Fun activities include playing games together they both have, crafts, and putting on puppet shows or storytime for each other.
- Working from home? Let your child be your "intern" for the day. Set up space next to your desk where they can quietly color or read.

For Older Children

- Write to people they admire: Artists, singers, authors, illustrators, gamers — the list is endless.
- Research colleges, universities and trade schools.
- Spend time on social media (with boundaries!).
- Look through their yearbooks.
- Phone, Facetime, Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Skype are all modalities for "meeting" online.
- Connect with local online groups. Many Dungeons and Dragons aficionados have moved sessions online.
- Online gaming
- Scrapbook using photos of family members or friends who they miss.
- Create a how-to tutorial for YouTube or TikTok on something they enjoy doing.
- Research if your house of worship offers online teen meetups.
- Find a cause to advocate for online. Many organizations have found ways to utilize volunteers and activists during COVID.
- Make sure teens have access to a Teen Lifeline.
- They can be found in most communities and in countries around the world.

How to Keep "School You" and "Home You" Separated

Adults can attest to how difficult it can be to disconnect from work in the digital age. It's no different for children. With many schools going virtual in response to COVID, it's vital to help create clear boundaries and end times for where school begins and ends at home.

Create a Special Place for School Work

- Even if children are not leaving for school, they can use their backpacks as storage to avoid losing or damaging school materials, and helps keep materials in one place.
- Distinguished spaces help children maintain focus by decreasing the amount of outside interference.

Distinguish Roles As Mr. Rogers Did

- Use a visual reminder for your role. Mr. Rogers put on tennis shoes and a cardigan to distinguish work from home.
- Have a morning opening. Sing a song, read a poem, or recite a daily blessing. Doing so allows children to separate the person they sat across from at breakfast and the one who will teach them long division math.
- Wear a badge. Create an ID badge with your role as the teacher or learning coach, depending on your position. If children try to argue with Mom, simply point to the badge to help them remember you're not in "Mom" mode at the moment.

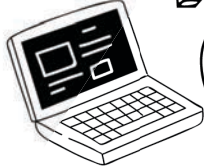
Embrace Technology

- Instead of going hoarse reminding children about what is due, allow online calendars to send them reminders. These digital notices allow more parent time rather than mixing school with the home.
- Set alarms for the end of the day, just like the traditional school bell. Provide a defined end to the school day.
- If children have school-related questions, have them add them to the calendar for the next school day. Doing so ensures they get addressed.

Schedule Out Time for Each Role

- Use online calendars to show all the different due dates, appointments, and to-do lists. Use color-coding to keep roles separated.
- Use online organization and tracking tools like Trello. Similar to calendars, these are great for keeping all your roles organized and accessible.
- Add "me" time to your day. Even 5 minutes of "me" time allows you to remember to honor your value.

Tips for Successful Online Learning



Technical Support

Even the most technologically savvy parent can run into issues without planning and maintenance. Here's how to stay a step ahead of tech problems.

- Make sure the internet is connected in the morning before school starts.
- Make a habit of plugging in electronics at night so they are ready the next day.
- Teach children how to care for and protect electronics (no food or drinks allowed nearby!). Schools usually send a contract when providing electronics; go over this with your child.

Stay Focused

It can be tempting for children to fall down internet rabbit holes. Help children maintain focus when online.

- Use parental controls. Internet sites can even be put on a schedule so children can access their favorites after school for a certain amount of time.
- Make regular rounds to observe what your child is doing.
- Do at least one check-in every hour, more for younger students.

Engage in Online Teacher Engagements

Be it Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any other platform for online learning, children can have difficulty engaging online.

- If allowed, let children choose a Zoom background that represents them.
- Work with teachers so they are aware of children who are shy or who have anxieties, so they can be sensitive to calling on them or helping with gentle nudges for engagement.
- Help children translate in vivo experiences online. Teach them how to virtually “raise their hand,” “applaud others,” and take turns communicating through messaging.

Transition From Electronics

Children have difficulty moving from using electronics to none. Help children give up their electronics for the day.

- Give 10-5-1 minute warnings for when electronics will be done.
- Have children do some movement activities as soon as they are done with electronics.
- Have children place school electronics in a special, safe charging place.

Organize Your Child's Learning Space



Children need a comfortable place to complete schoolwork. Virtual learners need a safe place for their tablets or computers. Luckily, you don't need a lot of room to turn your home into a cozy classroom setting.

Find a Workspace

- The average desktop is about two feet across, enough room to hold an organizer, books, and some supplies.
- Make sure the space is stable and safe for multiple items, especially electronics.
- Kitchen tables, coffee tables, and even spots on the floor make perfect work stations.

Think About Lighting

- Whenever possible, open curtains and windows to allow natural lighting to fill the space.
- Portable reading lights help read in dim settings, and they can also help children maintain focus.
- Provide small flashlights to help children follow along when reading.

Keep it Clean

- Work to keep the area clutter-free; end each day by having children pick up and wipe down their space.
- Give every supply a home, and include labels to help with clean up.
- For multiple children, assign each child a specific color to organize their space and keep supplies separated.
- Different colored placemats or rugs can help separate learners.

Organize and Energize

- If possible, invest in a whiteboard to track assignments, online sessions, and teacher phone numbers or emails.
- Add a feelings check-in. Use a changeable feelings scale for updating when emotions change throughout the day. Doing so offers a non-verbal cue when children need extra care and love.
- Use backpacks to hold school-related items. Make sure learners put all their supplies away in the evening.
- Use online calendars to keep track of each child's assignments.
- Create learning areas around the home. For example, a window box of plants can become the science area. Add some leaves, shells, a magnifying glass, and other items to study.

Helping Children Get Along While Learning from Home

Parents may be in charge of directing multiple children when homeschooling or as the learning coach for virtual education. Whether peers or siblings, multiple students can mean multiple distractions. Here are some ideas for providing consistency and safety.

Safety and Security

- Create a system for breaks. No one leaves the house without telling an adult.
- Create a list of rules together and hang them where they are easily seen.
- Make sure children keep hands and feet to themselves.
- Cheer for effort and highlight failure as learning opportunities.



Maintain Clear Boundaries for Students and Materials

- Use backpacks to contain personal items if individual desks aren't available.
- Color-code items to avoid fights over what belongs to who.
- Use colored-coded mats for dining table learning and/or color-coded rugs for floor space.
- Use personalized file folders to keep work separated.

Promote Communication

- Use a daily emotional check-in and check-out to deal with potential issues.
- Have children do a morning greeting where each student says hello to one another.
- Have children give highs and lows for the day. This can spotlight potential issues and strengthen relationships.
- Have a compliment jar and a complaint jar with a stack of post-its and a pen near it. Go through the jar daily. This is a good transition to close the school day. Make sure to work through complaints and end on a high note.



Teach Respect

- Some children can tolerate varying degrees of sensory input. Don't compare or complain over more sensitive children.
- Help give children words, as needed, to work through conflict management. Model the behavior often. "Jane, I really appreciate that you gave my pen back after you used it."
- Use a reward system for positive behaviors. Give each person a jar, a glass, or even a sack to keep their rewards in. Children get 5 rewards (beans, beads, marbles) that they can share with others when they observe respect. Children can earn a prize once they get a certain amount of rewards.



Our Family Rules and Agreements



BE RESPECTFUL

We will use active listening and take turns talking.

We will respect each other's personal space.

We will give each other time and space needed to relax, work, and play.

BE A SUPPORTIVE FAMILY MEMBER

We will do our best to follow our family rules.

We will be kind and understanding with each other.

We will contribute to keeping our home clean and safe.

We will spend time as a family doing fun, screen-free activities as often as possible.

CARE FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS

We will do our best to stay healthy and safe.

We will follow safety guidelines when outside.

We will let each other know when we feel lonely or sad.

We will ask for help when needed.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR DAY

We will plan our days and do our best to follow through.

We will look on the bright side and be grateful for what we have and can do.

We will limit our screen time to engage in creative, fun, and educational activities.

We will be realistic with expectations for ourselves and others.

Things I Can Control

Telling others when I feel lonely or sad



Finding a new interesting hobby



My attitude



Finding creative ways to stay in touch with my friends



Being kind and patient with my family



Staying safe by practicing social distancing

Washing my hands



Eating and sleeping well to stay strong and healthy



Actions of others



Taking classes online or homeschooling



Safety rules in my community



Not having big parties or celebrations



The decision of my school about how we're going to learn



If my favorite restaurant or museum closes



Things I Can't Control

MY BACK to SCHOOL



Interview



Big Life Journal

My name _____

I am  years old

Favorite color

Favorite song

Favorite animal

Favorite game

What new skill do you want to develop this year?

What do you want to practice and get better at this year?

How will this school year be different?



What are you most looking forward to this year?

My Daily Routine

MORNING

8AM

9AM

10AM

11AM

AFTERNOON

12PM

1PM

2PM

3PM

EVENING

4PM

5PM

6PM

7/8 PM

My Daily Checklist

TODAY'S DATE _____

MY LEARNING TASKS



MY CREATIVE PROJECTS



MY CONTRIBUTIONS AT HOME



OTHER THINGS I WANT OR NEED TO DO TODAY



My Feelings Meter

TODAY I FEEL...



Angry



Frustrated



Worried



Lonely



Sad



Not Sure



Bored



Calm



Joyful



Excited

5 Things I Can Do

To keep myself and others safe

1

Maintain 6 feet of distance

How far is 6 feet?

It's the length of a door, my bed, or a bike.

2

Wash my hands for a count of 20 seconds

How long is 20 seconds?

I can sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice, the "If You're Happy and You Know It" song, or the alphabet song

3

Wear a face mask

How do I wear it correctly?

✓ It covers my nose. ✓ It covers my mouth. ✓ It covers my chin.

Some people might not be wearing masks:

Children under 2 years of age, people whose doctor has told them not to, or those who might not understand why wearing a mask is important.

4

Stay healthy

✓ Drink water ✓ Eat healthy foods ✓ Get a good night's sleep

5

Take care of me

- ✓ Talk to an adult if I feel sad, lonely, or angry.
- ✓ Get a hug from a loved one who I live with.
- ✓ Write about or draw a picture of how I feel.

What Will I Do If...



...I get bored in a virtual lesson and want to play around online?



Why is it NOT a good idea?

I may miss important information from class.

I may be wasting my brain energy.

I may forget how long I've been off task and miss class events or time to complete my work.

What can I do to stay FOCUSED?

- ✓ Change my background on my meeting platform. Choose something I like.
- ✓ Keep some coloring pages and crayons or pencils to color while listening to lectures.
- ✓ Use one of my sensory tools: fidget spinners, putty, slime, stress balls, or squishy toys.



...I feel scared, angry, or out of control?

I will remember that these are uncertain times, and many people are feeling BIG emotions. And that's okay. **All of my feelings are okay.**

What can I do?

- ✓ Talk to an adult I trust.
- ✓ Use the calming activities I have learned.
- ✓ Do deep breathing to calm down.
- ✓ Imagine I'm a traffic light and imagine moving down from red to yellow, and then down to green.
- ✓ Ask questions if I'm scared or uncertain of something. If there is something adults don't know the answer to, I can imagine putting the question away on a shelf until someone can answer it.





Things I **[CAN]** Do

Looking on the bright side

THREE THINGS I FINALLY **GET TO** DO NOW:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

ONE **GOOD THING** THAT HAPPENED TO ME RECENTLY:

I AM **GRATEFUL** I HAVE:

I AM GLAD I **STILL CAN**:

I CAN TAKE CARE OF **MYSELF** BY

I CAN HELP MY **FAMILY** BY

I CAN HELP MY **COMMUNITY** BY



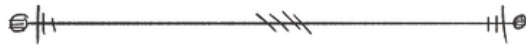
How to Start a Pen Pal Friendship



1 BE YOURSELF



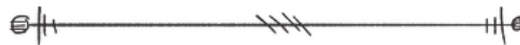
Your pen pal wants to know about YOU, your interests, your family, your favorite things, any interesting things you're doing and learning about. There's no need to impress your pen pal with long stories or big words — just be yourself and write as if you're speaking with a friend.



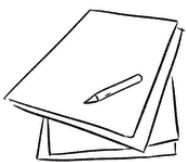
2 ASK QUESTIONS



Just like in regular conversation, it's important to show interest in learning about the other person. Asking questions also makes it likelier that your pen pal will continue to respond. Keep letters to two pages or less, include some drawings, cards, or photos, if desired.



3 KEEP IT GOING!



At the start of the pen pal relationship, agree with your pen pal how often you will write to each other (once a month, for example). Do your best to stick to the schedule.



Ideas for Your



Pen Pal Letter

- Places you've visited or would like to visit
- Favorite hobbies and interests
- Something interesting you're learning about
- Your family members
- Favorite family ritual or tradition
- Your pets
- Your city and what you like to do there
- Favorite foods
- Your bedroom or favorite part of your home
- Your recent art or craft
- Favorite outdoor and indoor activities
- A famous person you'd like to meet
- Favorite board or card game
- Favorite podcasts
- Favorite season
- Favorite color and how it makes you feel
- Favorite vacation
- Books and movies you love or are currently enjoying
- Your nickname or what name you would like to use and why
- Your biggest dream (e.g. What do you want to be when you grow up?)
- Favorite animal
- Your morning routine and/or evening routine
- Favorite YouTube channel
- A sport you play and how often you practice
- Three things you are grateful for right now
- Your volunteering experience
- Your previous pen pal (if you had one before)
- Favorite book or movie character
- Your goal and what you do to achieve it
- Your recent dream
- Something kind you did for someone recently
- Something you're proud of
- Your recent invention idea
- Things you would like to learn about
- Your recent trip somewhere
- Music or singers you like
- A recent gift you received and why you like it
- Fun or interesting information since your last letter
- An amazing thing that happened to you recently
- The musical instrument you're learning and how often you practice



HELLO

I AM

MY BIRTHDAY



My FAVORITE thing to do

A FUN fact about me

I could EAT _____ every day

One THING I can't live without:



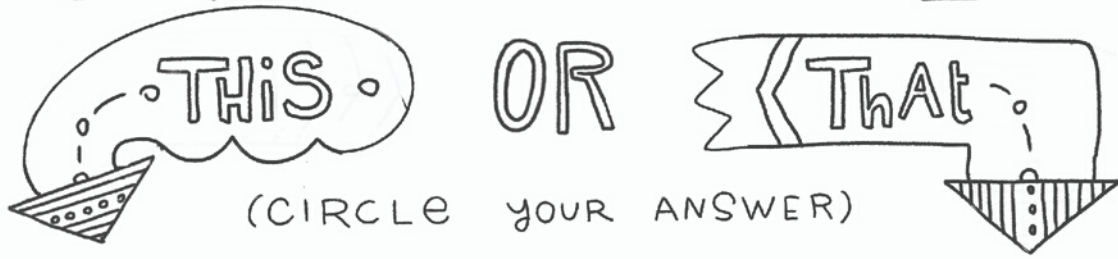
My dream VACATION place:

My SUPERPOWER:

I love LEARNING about

MY PLAYLIST
favorite songs to listen to

I Would Rather



Ice Cream OR Cupcakes



Be a Wizard OR Superhero



Talk to Animals OR Read Minds



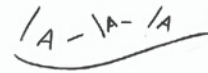
Eat Fruits OR Vegetables



Watch a Movie OR Read a Book



Dance OR Sing



Play Sports OR Play Music



Play Hide and Seek OR Dodgeball



Eat Breakfast
for Dinner



Eat Dinner
for Breakfast



CIRCLE = SOME = STUFF! *

CARTOONS MOVIES Read Dogs Friends Spring Video Games
ANIMALS TRAVEL SCHOOL Sing Dance FAMILY SUMMER FALL
GAMES CATS SCIENCE HISTORY WINTER MATH
COMPUTERS ARTS AND CRAFTS SNACKS SPORTS

Write down some words you circled and explain why.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

“Create” Your Own

Pep Talk

Watch the Pep Talk video [HERE](#). Record your own using the script below!

Hey, you! You with the friendly face!

Yes - YOU! What you have to say is important. Your ideas matter. All of them! Even the weird ones. Your voice matters. Your opinion matters. Your brrrrrain matters. YOU MATTER!

So, tell me what YOU think!

You have BIG ideas! Your ideas are unique! And YOU are unique. As unique as a coyote running up a mountain wearing shoes made of CHEESE!

There's no one like YOU! No one. And not everyone will like you. But that's okay. What other people think of you is no big deal.

Just make sure that YOU like YOU!

THAT's important. I like me!

You can choose to be kind. Kindness is your superpower!

Kindness is MY superpower.

And you can choose to be happy. But you don't need to be happy all the time. You can't really be happy all the time. Because things happen and then you get sad.

It's okay to be sad. And angry. And frustrated.

It's okay to cry.

All feelings are okay. Just ask for help when you need it.

Take up some space! Be yourself! You can do anything! You can learn anything, too!

But you don't need to learn EVERYTHING. You don't need to be good at everything, either.

You can be good at things you LIKE. And then, you can practice.

Practice is important. When you practice, you get better.

And stronger. And faster!

And sometimes you will make mistakes. Mistakes are okay. Mistakes are GREAT. You can learn a LOT from your mistakes.

Mistakes tell you what doesn't work. Mistakes help you GROW.

And they make your brain grow, too!

Your brain can get reaaaally big!

And if you're doing something very important.

Like dancing on a stage. Or playing a new game.

It's okay to be nervous. I'm nervous too, sometimes!

You can be afraid and do it anyway.

Just take a deeeeeep breath.

Because you can be BRAVE!

Don't let that fear stop you!

You gotta believe you can do it!

And make sure you're having fun. Lots of fun. Fun is very important.

I like having fun. Having fun is the BEST!

Hey, and one more thing.

You don't need to be perfect.

No one is perfect.

Actually, perfect doesn't exist.

You can just be yourself. Because being yourself is cool!

Being yourself is awesome!

Because you're loved just as you ARE!

Just. As. You. Are.

I love you!

You're loved. You're loved. You're loved!