

Office of Early Learning Virtual Supports and Online Resources

Parents with young children are facing an unprecedented demand to support their children’s learning at home—and technology can help, not only for families but also for preschool providers and teachers. In support of Florida’s families and preschool providers, the Office of Early Learning has created the guidance below to aide in the implementation of technology with our youngest learners, families and communities.



WAYS PROVIDERS AND TEACHERS CAN STAY CONNECTED WITH PRESCHOOL FAMILIES

Preschool providers have a wonderful opportunity to *stay connected* with the families they serve in a variety of ways. Most readily available is the use of smart phones and computer technology. Through these tools, educators can host a variety of *stay connected* opportunities with families and most importantly, children. Here are some fun and exciting *stay connected* suggestions educators can implement through the use of technology.

PROVIDERS:

- Establish regular communication with the families you serve. Make use of phone calls, text messaging, regular mail, emails, Facebook posts and virtual meetings to keep families engaged in their child’s learning and supported during this process.
- Keep in mind that not all families have access to electronic devices. Providers can make use of phone calls, group or individual text messages as well as sending information via regular mail.
- When hosting a virtual meeting or activity, it is very important that an adult is involved in the activity alongside the child to ensure effective use of technology for a quality experience.
- Establish a consistent schedule of events to support families while children are home. (i.e., host center wide virtual family meetings, host virtual story times, etc.)
- While the ability to engage with children virtually and provide some web-based instruction is powerful, remember children’s screen time should be limited and balanced with personal contact and interactions in their homes and child care settings.

TEACHERS:

- Set up **virtual small groups** by hosting a group of families/children from your classroom. Teachers can identify a particular group of students and provide them the opportunity to see each other and say hi, virtually. Technology is a great way to support social and emotional health, and helps families stay connected to each other.
- Host a **virtual story time** with your students via technology. When hosting a small or whole group gathering, teachers can read a favorite book from their classroom library.
- Host a **virtual group** activity with students. Schedule a small or whole group gathering and spend some time completing calendar activities with the children. The teacher may also lead the group in favorite songs, finger plays and poems. Take advantage of every opportunity and allow children to engage with each other by making recommendations of songs, poems or other familiar activities they would like to share with the group.

SUGGESTED TECHNOLOGY – For safety of all children, be sure your technology tool is password protected.

- [Google Hangout](#), FaceTime, [Skype](#), [WhatsApp](#) or [Zoom](#)



TAKE HOME ACTIVITIES

Another way for providers to support families during these challenging times is with **Take Home Activity Packets**. By providing weekly or bi-weekly activity packets, providers can support the continued mission of all students being ready for kindergarten.

Here are a few suggestions for the **Take Home Activity Packets**, but be creative and inventive.

- **Establish a distribution method for delivery of the Take Home Activity Packets.** Be sure to have established rules for pick up (e.g., packets will be placed outside the center at a specified time; parents are assigned a pick up time).
- **Take Home Activity Packets** should include both virtual supports as well as adult supervised and independent student activities.
- **Establish a center or class theme** to keep children engaged during these weeks of virtual learning. Themes can be anywhere from gardening to zoo animals. Use this theme for most of the stories, activities and lessons shared with families and children.
- **Use daily activity calendars** such as the [Ready Freddy](#) calendar to support learning at home. In addition, providers and teachers can identify theme-based activities for students to complete (e.g., Monday – collect a bag of pinecones and sort them by size; Tuesday – paint pinecones using spring colors to resemble Easter Eggs; Wednesday – parent hides the pinecones and child will hunt them. How many did you find?).
- **Provide a variety of “hands-on” learning task ideas** – Allow children to practice many of the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) utilizing hands-on tasks (e.g., sorting laundry by color, counting silverware when helping to empty the dishwasher or putting away dishes - how many spoons? how many forks? or creating a pattern using large and small plastic cups and/or bowls).
- **Include craft or art activities** – Include a list or provide the materials necessary for students to create an art project (i.e., toilet paper rolls, construction paper, feathers, etc.). Ask parents to post a picture of their child’s project on the school’s Facebook page or bring to the virtual group gathering.
- **Provide parents with detailed instructions and supports that encourage conversations with their children.** Asking questions about the child’s project or task allows them the opportunity to explain what they are making or doing, why they created it, and all the parent has to do is listen.
- **Provide ideas for outside play** – For example, painting with water on the driveway, gardening, studying caterpillars and butterflies, exploring with a magnifying glass, set up a water play station with a variety of everyday kitchen tools and bowls, build an outdoor tent for reading and sharing stories.
- **Provide tips to help parents establish daily virtual school routines.**
 - Flexible daily schedule of activities (e.g., 8:00 breakfast, 8:30 read a book and discuss the story or problem presented in the story, 9:00 create a craft, 9:30 play outside etc.)
 - Identify play and learning zones in the home (e.g., construction area for blocks and large construction toys; small chair or pillow area for reading quietly; small table for writing and crafts; outside space that is protected and safe)



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR PRESCHOOL FAMILIES

While there are a wealth of educational resources—[online games at PBS KIDS](#), author readings on Instagram, even from Hollywood celebrities (e.g. [Jennifer Garner, #savewithstories](#)), [live video streams from zoos](#) — it can be overwhelming for families to get started. [Using Technology to Support Learning at Home: Simple Tips for Parents of Young Children](#) is a great resource to share with families to help them get started with thinking about the use of technology to support learning at home. It provides five guiding principles on getting started so parents can effectively support children’s learning at home. It also includes tips on building positive technology habits, and support on what to look for when selecting an app for learning.

Online Learning Resources

Here are ten online learning resources for consideration to share with families to support children’s learning at home. Encourage parents to use the technology guidelines and tips provided in *Using Technology to Support Learning at Home: Simple Tips for Parents of Young Children* to select the best online resource for their child and family.

1. [PBS Kids](#) – Hang out with your favorite characters all while learning.
2. [Storyline Online](https://www.storylineonline.net/library/) <https://www.storylineonline.net/library/> is available 24 hours a day for children, parents, caregivers and educators. Each book includes material developed by a credentialed elementary educator, aiming to strengthen comprehension and verbal and written skills.
3. [National Geographic for Kids](#) – Learn all about geography and fascinating animals.
4. [Waterford](#) – Offers FREE Early Learning Boost emails that will help you engage your child in positive learning experiences during the week. Three times a week, your inbox will get videos and activities teaching literacy, math, or science concepts for 3 and 4-year-olds.
5. [Starfall](#) – Practice your early literacy and math skills, and join read-along stories as well.
6. [Suessville](#) – Read, play games and hang out with Dr. Seuss and his friends.
7. The [San Diego Zoo](#) website just for kids has amazing videos, activities, and games.
8. [Reading Rockets Recommended Literacy Apps](#) – Reading Rockets helps parents find the very best educational apps that provide practice with essential skills in early literacy. There are also apps for children with dyslexia, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder which support organization and goal-setting, language and communication, and emotional regulation.
9. [Transition to Kindergarten](#) – Find helpful and developmentally appropriate resources for both educators and parents for assisting children with making the transition from preschool to kindergarten.
10. For additional resources to support families with student learning at home, visit the Florida Department of Education’s Free Resources for Families & Teachers at: <http://www.fldoe.org/em-response/resources-families.stml>.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

- **Don’t be afraid** – technology is new to many of you, but this is a great time to learn something new. This can be a great opportunity to connect with students about overcoming your own fears.
- **Ask for help** – please contact your local ELC, the VPK Regional Facilitator and the Office of Early Learning for support.
- **Be a risk-taker** and step out of your comfort zone.
- **Have fun** by helping students and families conquer virtual learning.

