

Teacher: 'You don't have to strive for perfection' when homeschooling your kids

It's OK if you hate teaching math. You're off the hook here.

March 19, 2020, 11:10 AM MDT / Source: TODAY

By Terri Peters

As schools continue to remain closed throughout the country due to coronavirus, more and more parents are finding themselves with an unexpected and challenging new job title: Teacher.

Kids have lists of online lessons to complete and curriculum to review with their moms and dads, and parents may be feeling more than a little overwhelmed by the workload and the pressure to help their children make the right amount of progress during the time their schools remain closed.

Oona Hanson, a mom, educator and parent coach who lives in Los Angeles, California, has taught English in secondary schools in Massachusetts and California. Hanson holds master's degrees in educational psychology and English, and now gives parent education workshops and offers one-on-one coaching for parents of teens and tweens as they navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Oona Hanson, an educator and parent coach, says when it comes to teaching kids at home, parents should practice self-compassion. Here, Hanson tells TODAY Parents what teachers wish parents knew about home learning during COVID-19-related school closures.

1. Take it easy on yourself

Although some parents may have the time and resources to throw themselves into intense homeschooling mode overnight, it's not realistic for most people. Expectations and guidance vary greatly from school to school (and even teacher to teacher), so what one family is doing with their kids might not make sense for yours.

Try to avoid social comparison; cute color-coded schedules and elaborate crafts just might not work in your house, and that's OK. Remember that we're modeling for our kids that we don't have to strive for perfection or imitate what others are doing.

2. Let them get bored

Kids are used to having lots of structured activities and near-constant visual stimuli at their fingertips. Letting them sit with the discomfort of boredom may be really hard at first — for all of you — but it's worth it to let them struggle. Imagination, creativity, and self-discovery blossom during boredom.

3. Lean into reading

Maintaining and building reading skills will serve students at every level. While younger kids love being read to by a parent, you don't have to do all the heavy lifting. Actors are reading children's books aloud online, and audiobooks are more accessible than ever. While most public libraries are closed, many offer electronic downloads of e-books.

Whenever possible, let kids choose their own books. Following a child's interest is more important than identifying the right reading level; when motivated by their own curiosity, kids can stretch their reading comprehension. And don't dismiss graphic novels; they are great for reluctant readers and voracious book worms alike.

4. It's OK if you hate math

Unless you love exploring math with your kids, go easy on yourself with this one. And since most parents are unfamiliar with — and even afraid or suspicious of — the current approaches to math, you're really off the hook here.

Luckily, there are many high quality online resources for math, such as Kahn Academy and Bedtime Math. Younger kids can use flash cards to maintain or build automaticity with their math facts, and they can do it on their own, without an adult or a computer.

5. Don't forget home economics

We've all heard the horror stories of young adults going out into the world not knowing how to do even the most basic household tasks. This is the perfect time for them to learn key life skills, such as cleaning, cooking, laundry and pet care. With teens, you can introduce financial literacy by including them in your checkbook balancing, budgeting and online bill-paying.

6. Give them choices

Some kids may have structured schedules for online classes. But for others, you can let them have a say in how, when and where they want to do their work. This is a great chance to build their metacognition – where they can become more aware of how their own learning and thinking process works.

7. Be intentional with screen time

It's helpful to separate screen time for school from screen time for leisure, so encourage kids to switch gears with some physical cues – for instance, have them use a computer at a desk for schoolwork and later watch a movie on the TV while sitting on the couch.

Having family movie nights – or even weekend movie marathons – can make screen time a chance to connect rather than just zone out. If your child has a cell phone, ask for their input on establishing reasonable boundaries around phone usage; and remember they may need their phone now more than ever, as it gives them access to essential social connections.

8. Go old-school

Even if your child is accessing school materials online, this is a perfect moment to make space for some low-tech activities. Encourage them to pull out the art supplies and get their hands dirty. Writing an old fashioned letter to friends or family – or even fan mail to a

celebrity – helps them not only feel connected but also supports communication and fine motor skills.

9. Model self-care

This is an anxiety-provoking time, so it's important to take care of our own mental health, whether that's accessing a care provider by telemedicine, enjoying our favorite comfort food or going for a daily walk – whatever it is that works for us, given the parameters of social distancing or even shelter-in-place requirements.

It can be helpful to name our actions for our kids – for example, “I really love taking baths, so I'm going to go relax in the tub because it's been a really hard day.”

10. Let kids feel their feelings

Social-emotional skills are at the core of all meaningful learning and are key to our overall well-being. While our kids may not always have access to ideal instruction in their academic subjects, they can still learn essential emotional literacy skills that will serve them their entire lives.

This moment gives us the opportunity to help our kids name and process lots of difficult stuff, so acknowledge their worries and fears and frustrations and just be with them. We aren't “fixing” anything; we're showing them the power of feeling heard and valued.

We can also reassure our kids that having some anxiety is normal – it's one of the things that helps us remember to wash our hands and to follow the other public health guidelines. Our kids are going to remember this moment forever. Teaching them how to weather a crisis just may be the most important lesson they ever learn.