



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

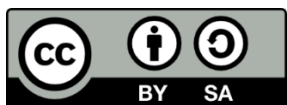


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**Supporting
Learners Studying
through ODFL:
A Guide for
Parents in the
Pacific**

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



Commonwealth of Learning, 2023

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Introduction

Welcome to *Supporting Learners Studying through ODFL: A Guide for Parents in the Pacific*.

The **Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific** is a project designed to help enhance the capacity and efficiency of education sectors in the Pacific through the use of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL). This project is supported by the **New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)** and implemented in collaboration with the **Commonwealth of Learning (COL)** and the **University of the South Pacific (USP)**. A deliverable of the project is this guide to help parents support their children who are engaging in ODFL, especially through online mediums.

COL is an intergovernmental organisation concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning. The USP is a Pacific regional university run as an intergovernmental organisation and jointly owned by the governments of 12 member countries: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Samoa. The **Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)** is an initiative of COL and USP.

PACFOLD aims to promote the adoption and application of ODFL methods and technologies to address the geographic challenges confronting the Pacific Islands and their people. One of these challenges, as identified by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. The adoption of innovative and varied educational strategies – for instance, nontraditional approaches such as ODFL methods and technologies – can help provide quality access to learning for all.

Purpose of the Guide

Why is this guide needed?

ODFL is well-placed to address access to education in the Pacific where

- there is limited access to secondary and post-secondary opportunities in rural and outer island locations
- natural disasters, such as tropical storms and flooding, further limit access to schools and quality education
- there remains the possibility of another debilitating strain of Covid-19 or another disease leading to a return to lockdowns and school closures

Access to technology, devices and connectivity is growing in the Pacific; however, growth is not equal among all countries or communities. “Technology offers an education lifeline for millions but excludes

many more” (UNESCO 2023, p. 27). There is an evident digital divide, which is worsened by geography (urban, rural, remote, maritime), economics, education, etc.



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That said, great strides are being made to decrease this disparity in the Pacific. As technology becomes increasingly accessible to rural and remote students, ODFL becomes a viable option for students in remote and maritime locations who wish to complete secondary or tertiary studies. ODFL has the potential to enable remote students to access world-class education resources while remaining with their families and in their communities. As open educational resources become more widely available online, including courses of study from top-rated universities, rural flight can be lessened. Access to open educational resources and courses may eliminate prohibitive education expenses, such as travel, accommodation or tuition fees.

Moreover, as each generation becomes increasingly technologically savvy, students want to learn in new digital ways that are ever more learner-centred, autonomous, asynchronous, adaptable and flexible. Open educational resources and ODFL can help the Pacific to build more accessible and resilient education systems that support learning beyond the physical boundaries of a school classroom.



[Vanuatu scholars](#) by [Richard Ellender](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

This guide is intended as a resource to help parents understand their transformed roles when supporting their children in ODFL. The information here will enhance your knowledge and understanding of how to support, supervise, monitor and motivate your child. This guide is neither a general guide on parenting nor one on parental engagement in education. Rather, it specifically addresses the adaptive and supplemental support parents should offer their children who are engaging in forms of ODFL, either as part of their in-class learning or in a fully online medium of instruction, whether by choice or in response to school closures or emergency circumstances.

For Whom Is This Guide?

This guide is designed for parents and guardians of children living in Pacific Island nations who wish to support their children in ODFL.

It is a well-established fact that parents' involvement in their children's education improves learning outcomes. Often, parental involvement, especially in the Pacific, is focused more on supporting the school through fundraising, volunteering or attending parent and annual meetings, and less on their children's academic progress. During school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, parents were pushed to become involved in their children's academic activities, taking a more active role supporting and monitoring their children's learning, whether through online instruction time or offline worksheets. True parental engagement is "the active participation of parents in their children's learning and development in collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders" (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2022, p. 17).

The *2023 United Nations Global Education Monitoring Report* reminds us of the need for the human element in education. It advises that "no screen can ever replace the humanity of a teacher" (UNESCO, 2023, p. vii). Technology should complement learning; it should not replace the teacher and the human element in instruction. In cases where a teacher is not physically present, parents assume the critical role of providing the 'human' element in their child's learning process. "Parental engagement and support ... [are] critical in facilitating remote learning" (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021, as cited in UNESCO, 2023, p. 41).

What Does This Guide Include?

This guide is written to help parents and caregivers whose children are pursuing their education through open, distance and/or flexible study options, especially through online sources.

It is divided into four main sections:

- ***Getting Started*** defines frequently used terminology, highlights the benefits and challenges of e-learning, discusses your new role as parent teacher and gives tips for setting up the physical and virtual learning environment. This section includes important information regarding online safety.
- ***Supporting Your Child's Learning Journey*** helps you build relationships with your child and your child's teacher and gives advice on how to keep a balanced family life. This section also shares guidance on how to provide academic and emotional support to your child.
- The ***Tips to Overcome Common Challenges*** section is designed to help you navigate tricky situations that may arise, for instance, if your child does not listen to you or will not get off electronic devices. It also provides support for single parents and homes with multiple children engaging in ODFL.

- **Remote Learning in Diverse Circumstances** shares specific information on how to support children with disabilities, navigate a multilingual home or thrive in an emergency setting.

Each section includes general information and advice and concludes with a set of reflective questions to help you consider how you are doing.

The appendices at the end of the guide include 1) a getting started checklist, and 2) links to resources for further reading/viewing.

What Will This Guide Achieve?



Outcomes

As a parent, guardian or caregiver of a child engaging in ODFL, this guide will help you:

- understand and appreciate your roles and responsibilities in supporting your child’s ODFL
- know how to set up safe learning spaces (physical and online) that are conducive to your child’s learning
- establish learning routines that maintain a proper balance between screen time and non-screen time, and learning and playing time and which motivate your child in applying self-directed and autonomous learning
- access support from online forums, websites and chat groups linked to your child’s school, your social or religious communities, or by other means
- build and strengthen relationships with your child, their teachers and their schools
- be confident in your abilities to support your child’s ODFL
- feel motivated to support your child’s ODFL

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed as a personal reference guide for parents, guardians and caregivers. Each section is written so that you may either read through the book from start to finish or jump to sections that are of particular interest to you. If you have specific questions, you can search through Section IV: *Tips to Overcome Common Challenges*. This section is arranged by question and provides links to earlier sections where you can find the appropriate information.

In addition, this guide may be useful as a resource to inform a parent training course or inform discussions among school administrators, teachers, parents and guardians on the roles and responsibilities of parents, guardians and caregivers in supporting children engaging in ODFL.

Getting Started



Terminology

Defining Terminology

It is easy to feel overwhelmed or confused by the many ways ODFL is referred to. Here are definitions of some common terms you may come across:

- **Face-to-face learning:** learning that occurs in person; students are taught by a teacher in a physical learning space, such as a classroom. You may see the term written as **F2F**.
- **Remote learning:** learning where the students and teacher are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment. It is also called **distance learning**.
- **Online learning:** instruction that takes place through the Internet. The students and teacher are separated and connect through Internet sites such as Zoom or Google Classroom. Learning material may be presented through videos or materials that are sent to the student via email or accessed through a website. This type of learning is a type of **remote or distance learning**. Online learning is sometimes called **e-learning**.
- **E-learning (electronic learning):** learning that takes place using electronic technologies – most often the Internet accessed via computers, tablets and mobile phones.
- **Blended learning:** learning that combines face-to-face learning with online learning. Students and teachers meet face to face and this is supplemented by online learning activities.
- **Hybrid learning:** learning where some students are engaging with the teacher face to face while others are participating online.
- **Synchronous learning:** instruction when the teacher and the students are participating at the same time in either a face-to-face or online learning situation. The opposite is **asynchronous learning**, which is when interactions among students and teachers are separated by time or space. Often, there is a time lag in communication. Examples of asynchronous interaction are email and online discussion threads where students and teachers post questions and comments whenever they are online.
- **Open learning:** instruction that is committed to removing barriers to accessing education (e.g., geography, cost and age).
- **Open schooling:** the provision of schooling (teaching and learning) opportunities by making use of open, distance and innovative e-learning methods that do not necessarily require teachers and learners to be in the same place at the same time. It refers to the physical separation of the school learner from the teacher and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies and information and communications technologies to bridge the separation and provide education and training.

- **Flexible learning:** learning where the students have a variety of choices for when, where and how they learn. Flexible learning includes online learning, remote or distance learning, and face-to-face learning – separately or in combination – especially where there are options to learn part-time or by fast-track mode, in the evenings or on weekends or holidays, etc.
- **ODFL:** flexible distance education opportunities that seek to remove or lessen barriers to access, such as finances, prior learning, age, social, work or family commitments, disability, incarceration, and allow the greatest access to the largest number of people, no matter their personal situation.
 - **Open** refers to a commitment to remove unnecessary barriers to access.
 - **Distance** refers to teaching and learning that temporarily separate teacher and learner in time and/or place.
 - **Flexible** refers to variety and choice in when, where and how to learn.
 (Definitions adapted from COL, 2023)

Benefits of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning

ODFL has many benefits. For instance, your child can access quality education from home, no matter where you live, as long as you have good Internet access. And, if the instruction is asynchronous, your child can learn at their own pace and do their assignments anytime they wish. However, these same benefits can also be challenges. If you do not have a strong Internet connection or if your child learns better face to face with other students and a teacher, online learning may be challenging for them.

Some sources suggest that online learning is more flexible, cost-effective and of higher quality. However, a 2023 report by the United Nations warns that the costs of e-learning technology may be higher than thought. The report also reminds us that digital technology should not be a substitute for but complementary to face-to-face interaction with teachers (UNESCO, 2023).

E-learning can be even more challenging in situations where

- children are located in remote areas
 - teachers and schools are not set up for e-learning
 - parents are not comfortable with technology
 - Internet access is limited
 - the quality of education may already be low
 - students have special learning needs – including disabilities
- (Petretto et al., 2021)

This is particularly true when ODFL is implemented owing to an emergency situation, as in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Remember, ODFL is more than using technology and having distance between the teacher and the student. It should include

- a clear structure for the learning
- appropriate levels of student–teacher interaction
- opportunities for students to manage their learning

It is important to observe and speak to your child to find out how ODFL works for them. Do not hesitate to reach out to your child’s teacher or school if your child is having a hard time.



Ask yourself ...

- What is face-to-face learning? What is e-learning?
- Does your child respond better to face-to-face, online or blended learning? How do you know?
- What are the benefits and challenges of ODFL?

Understanding Your New Parenting Role

Parents are the first educators of their children, teaching them various skills from the day they are born.

You are probably already

- ensuring your child is cared for and protected from harm
- promoting your child's holistic development
- setting and enforcing boundaries to regulate your child's activities and behaviour
- looking for your child's potential and finding opportunities for growth

In many ways, you have always been the 'teacher' at home, while your child has had another teacher at school for academic learning.



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When your child shifts to ODFL at home, your role as the parent will change. You will take on some tasks that the classroom teacher once did because they are no longer physically present. For example, you may need to

- help your child set a learning routine
- answer questions during school hours
- keep your child on task and motivated

The teacher will continue to provide instruction on new concepts and set learning assignments. You do not have to replace the teacher – but you will need to share responsibilities and adapt to some roles that you previously did not have.

As a parent, guardian or caregiver, you have already fulfilled many roles in your child’s life, such as caretaker, communicator, routine builder, guardian of your child’s well-being, role model, counsellor and motivator. Now, you will be even more involved in your child’s learning, helping to monitor and supervise your child’s learning and acting as a “friendly teacher” (Udulog, 2022, p. 106). In addition, you will need to work closely with your child’s teacher to

- provide tender, loving care to boost your child’s emotional safety and sense of belonging
- monitor your child’s growth and development
- identify any signs of disability for early intervention
- identify your child’s natural talents and abilities
- discuss observed character, behavioural and indiscipline issues and take the necessary action
- engage in peaceful and prompt resolution of conflicts that may arise
(COL, n.d., p. 24)

As a parent, you may be new to the ODFL experience, never having taken an online course yourself. You will have some things to learn, but also much to share based on your life experience and your ability to self-manage offline tasks and establish and maintain relationships. As an adult, you play an important role in your child’s learning. You do not need to be a teacher or highly educated yourself. Your presence and showing interest in your child’s learning will be the most important things you can provide.



Ask yourself ...

- What do you think your role is in supporting your child’s ODFL?
- How do you feel about the increased responsibilities you have for your child’s learning?

- How can you act as a ‘friendly’ teacher or a parent teacher?
- What does your child know that you do not know?
- How can you show interest in your child’s learning?

Setting Up the Learning Environment



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Creating a Conducive Physical Environment

- **Designate a learning space:** Your child will need a place where they can learn. If possible, set up a table and chair in a room or a corner of the house that can represent ‘school’. This could be a spot that is made special with some kind of visual signal (a picture, a placemat, a chair) indicating it is a learning space. If your child is small, you can use a box for a desk. You can also put up a curtain to create a learning area.

Having a designated space that represents school will help your child focus. It will also allow them to ‘leave school’ when they move away from that space. That way, they can properly rest, play and let their mind wander to other things. They will not feel like they are always at school.

You may need to use the dining table. If so, do something to signal when the space is for eating and when it is for learning. This could be as simple as putting down a different mat or a tablecloth to represent each activity.

Ensure the temperature is not too hot or too cold and that the space is well ventilated and lit, and not near bothersome odours or loud or irritating noises. If you cannot find a quiet place, your child may need to use earphones or earplugs to minimise distractions. Listening to music or the radio may also help your child focus. Try out several possibilities and explore what works for everyone.

- **Provide adequate learning materials:** Along with a place to study, your child will need learning materials. In addition to digital devices (discussed below), learning materials include pens, pencils, erasers, sharpeners, textbooks, exercise books, free reading books, etc. As parents and caregivers, it is your responsibility to make sure your children have the materials that will enable them to learn at home. Having all these resources makes it easier for children to learn well.

Setting up Digital Devices and Internet Access

To enable ODFL with an online element, your child will need access to a digital device to get online and access learning materials and instruction through the Internet. Digital devices include a desktop or laptop computer, a tablet or a mobile phone (smartphone). Different devices are better for different tasks. For instance, a smartphone can be used to watch an instructional video or participate in an online class discussion. A device with a larger keyboard, such as a desktop, may be better for writing an online examination that requires longer answers or essays.

You will need to arrange for Internet services at your home. This can be done through an Internet service provider or a mobile phone provider with data included in your plan. The amount of data provided will vary according to the Internet or phone carrier, your plan and your country. If your child will be doing much online studying, it will be more economical to get an uncapped or limitless data plan. However, this expense may be beyond your budget. In this case, you will need to set a daily routine to ensure the data are being used for the most important learning tasks and not spent mindlessly scrolling through social media or playing online games.

If you have limitless data through your cell phone provider, you can use the data on your phone for your other devices through a process called *hot spotting*. But be careful – if you do not have limitless data on your phone, hot spotting may use up all of your data allocation quite quickly. If you do have limitless data on your phone, this is a good way to connect all your devices to the Internet.

You may have one or more devices, such as a tablet or phone, that cannot access wireless Internet. In this instance, you can share an Internet connection from another device through a process called *tethering*. Tethering can be done using a USB cable, connecting your devices using Bluetooth or by hot spotting (explained above). In essence, you are using your data-enabled device (such as a smartphone) as a router to spread the Internet to several other devices.

Instructions on how to set up a hotspot on a mobile phone are provided below.

For an iPhone:

1. Go to Settings > (Cellular) > Personal Hotspot > Allow Others to Join
2. Tap Allow Others to Join.
3. Note your network name and password. Others can join your hotspot by finding the network and entering the password.

For an Android phone:

1. Go to Settings/Connections/Mobile Hotspot and Tethering,
2. Tap Mobile Hotspot to turn it on. You may need to turn your Wi-Fi off.
3. Note your network name and password. Others can join your hotspot by finding the network and entering the password.



Ask yourself...

- How can you create a designated learning space for your child, and what can you do to signal when the space is ‘school’ and when the space is ‘home’?
- Does your child have access to (non-digital) learning materials and supplies?
- Does your child have a digital device (desktop, laptop, tablet, phone) that is appropriate for their learning needs?
- Do you have a limitless data plan, or do you need to carefully decide when and how much your child can be on the Internet for their learning?
- Can your child study in a library or community centre where there is a quiet learning space and where you can access the Internet for free?

Accessing Lessons and Online Resources

Your child may be very savvy in using social media and accessing online entertainment such as YouTube; however, they may not know how to use educational technologies and websites, which follow a different process. Your child may need assistance from you or their teacher to access and use online resources and websites. This may require explicit instructions, support and improving your child’s **digital literacy** skills to succeed in their online learning.

Digital Literacy

The term **digital literacy** refers to the skills and capabilities that are needed to live, learn and work using online resources. Digital skills for everyday life include

- using email, instant messaging
- posting to social media and uploading photographs
- using a search engine to find useful information
- online shopping and banking

These digital literacy skills are important for your child’s online learning and can make a difference in how successful they are at researching, collaborating with other students or writing assignments. Your child will need to develop these digital skills – if they do not already have them – and/or strengthen them to get the most out of their online learning.

Digital Citizenship

Depending on their age, your child may already be digitally literate and regularly involved in social media online. It is important, however, that your child is a **digital citizen** – someone who has the skills and knowledge to use the Internet and other digital technology *effectively* and *responsibly* (Dictionary.com, emphasis added).

Digital citizenship includes

- handling yourself appropriately and ethically in a digital environment
- being aware of the impact of your actions on the digital communities you are part of
- contributing to the community in a mature and responsible way

Another essential aspect of digital citizenship is being able to communicate online. The notion of ‘netiquette’ refers to the guidelines for appropriate behaviour when communicating with others online in writing. As a parent, you should help your child to

- be sure that what they say is appropriate to the context, clear, relevant, to the point and courteous.
- present their opinions sensitively and acknowledge the other person’s point of view, even if this is different to their own
- think about who they are communicating with and adopt the appropriate tone for communication with, for example, a friend, another student, a teacher, etc.
(Go ON UK, 2015, as cited in Open Learn, 1999-2023)

What we do online has an impact on other people. The way in which your child communicates online to their teachers and other students will have a real impact on their experience with online learning. It is important for you to monitor your child and help them learn how to be a good digital citizen in their online classroom and other communications.

School Lessons and Resources

Your child may be comfortable with technology for social media and entertainment purposes; however, they may be unfamiliar with using education technology. Depending on your child’s age and digital literacy, you may need to help them access their school lessons and learning resources.

Your child may be engaging in ODFL through

- online courses and resources (e.g., school-based online instruction, massive open online courses or open educational resources)
- offline resources (e.g., collecting assignments from school or through the mail)
- a combination of both

A **massive open online course** is an online course available for large enrolment on the open web, where *open* largely refers to open registration, and not necessarily courses that are openly licensed (COL, 2023).

Open educational resources are any “learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others” (UNESCO OER Recommendation 2019, as cited in COL, 2023). An example of an open educational resource is **open textbooks**, which are published with an open license and available to download for free and to use or adapt for different purposes.

Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment. Open Education maximises the power of the Internet to make education more affordable, accessible and effective. (SPARC, 2007–2023)

For online activities, your school may use a **learning management system (LMS)** that organises the e-learning.

An LMS, also referred to as a “course management system or virtual learning environment, is a web-based software system that assists teachers to manage courses and deliver lessons online. It helps in administration, tracking and reporting of the learning process” (COL, 2023). Moodle, Blackboard-Learn and Google Classroom are examples of LMSs.

You and your child do not need to understand exactly how an LMS works, but you will need to know how to

- open and close an Internet browser
- launch a course
- find materials online
- go back to a previous page
- bookmark pages to find later
- open multiple windows so you can ‘toggle’ back and forth between the course and other digital material
- restore a browser that has been accidentally closed (press Ctrl + Shift + T, and the window will reopen)

Your child will also need to know how to type, use a trackpad or a mouse and set up videoconferencing through Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams for education. You may need to help your child download the correct software and troubleshoot common issues such as

- accidentally closing windows
- deleting text
- having the microphone on mute
- having speakers at the wrong volume level or output source
- linking and delinking Bluetooth headphones

You should also know how to address poor connectivity, the computer not working, a Zoom link not working, a video stream freezing, etc. If you do not know how to support your child in this way, reach out to your child’s teacher or an older child. It is inevitable that your child will face these situations, and having a plan to address them will help you all stay calm.



Ask yourself...

- Are you and your child digitally literate?
- Does your child know how to use the Internet in a mature and responsible manner?
- How will your child access ODFL? Is there a student learning portal or hub through an LMS such as Google Classroom? An online repository for open learning resources? A homework or assignment page?
- Does your child need help to access open educational resources?
- Will your child need to use Zoom or other videoconferencing software?
- Who can you call on for support if there is an issue with the technology?

Ensuring Online Safety

Safety is an important aspect of ODFL, especially for children. Online safety includes the following aspects:

- Managing your digital identity (names you use online, photographs, other information you share about yourself) and protecting your privacy and that of other people.
- Making sure you have strong passwords and that you do not leave your devices lying around in public areas.
- Avoiding **cybercrime** by regularly updating **antivirus software** on your computer and enabling securing **settings (firewalls)**.
- Avoiding false information online, including scams and hoaxes where others may try to take advantage of you.

Cyber Safety

Cybercrime refers to criminal acts performed on computers or via the Internet. Types of cybercrime your child may encounter include the following:

- **Catfishing:** a predator creates a fake online identity on social media and interacts with your child, usually trying to get them to reveal information.
- **Cyberbullying:** online harassment and bullying.
- **Pornography:** inappropriate sexual content (photographs, drawings, videos, etc.) on websites or chat groups.
- **Viruses and malware:** pieces of computer code designed to gain access to your computer system or device and corrupt or destroy data on your device, often without your knowledge.

Ensure that you and your child create strong **passwords** to gain access to your devices and learning platforms. Avoid passwords that are easy to guess, such as names or birthdays. **Two-**

factor authentication, where you need to provide two pieces of information (e.g., a username and then a password), is a good idea. It is also a good idea to ensure your computer has a **firewall** in place. A firewall is software that alerts you if it thinks a program or person is trying to access your data without your permission. Most computer systems come with a built-in firewall. You can check your firewall status by going to your computer *Settings, Privacy and Security* and then *Windows Security*. Make sure your firewall is always on. **Antivirus software** will detect and block threats from viruses and malware. Make sure your devices have antivirus software and that it is updated regularly. It is important to keep your antivirus software up to date. Your antivirus software is also found in the same place as your firewall.

Online or Cyberbullying

Online or **cyberbullying** is mistreatment or harassment that takes place online. It can include

- posting comments that are rude, threatening or untrue about you online
- posting photographs to make you look bad
- sharing your personal information without your permission, etc.

It is similar to bullying at school; however, online bullying is especially tough because your child cannot escape it – it follows them everywhere via social media, text messages, emails, etc. It can also reach a wider audience very fast and is widely visible, easy to pass along and difficult to erase. It can cause your child serious distress.

Signs of (online) bullying

As a parent, you may observe signs that something is not quite right. Your child may

- appear afraid to attend the online school or make excuses not to attend it (being sick)
- not want to participate in online chat sessions or teacher videos
- start to get lower grades or not do as well as they did before
- become nervous, distressed or anxious
- lose confidence or act withdrawn
- have problems eating or sleeping
- start to pick fights or bully others
- not want to show you their online communication (emails and texts)

If you notice anything out of the ordinary, talk to your child. It may take a while for them to open up. Make sure to listen, and not to judge.

You may discover that your child is the one bullying someone online. Find out if they are acting up because they are being hurt by others. Ensure your child knows that it is wrong to text, write

or post anything that deliberately offends, hurts or otherwise harms anyone else in any way, including someone they do not like or do not know. “Make them aware of how they would feel if they were on the other end of such behaviour” (Get Safe Online, 2023).

In addition, make sure your children know “they must guard their computer and mobile device with password or PINs so that even the most casual text message or email cannot be copied or hijacked and used to bully someone else in their name” (Get Safe Online, 2023).

Parental Controls

The Internet provides access to a huge amount of information and services, some of which are inappropriate for children. **Parental controls** will allow you to prevent your child from accessing online content (websites, photographs, videos) that you feel is inappropriate for your child to access, based on your child’s age and ability or your family beliefs and values. Parental controls can help you to

- plan what time of the day your child can go online and for how long
 - create content filters to block applications that may have inappropriate content
 - manage the content different family members can see
- (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2023)

You can set these controls on your Wi-Fi, phone network, individual applications and devices (phones, tablets, computers). For instance, on your laptop, look for *Settings, Privacy & Security, Search Permissions*. There you can set safe search guidelines (strict, moderate or none) that will block websites that show content that is inappropriate for children.

It is important to talk to your child about the parental controls you are setting so that they do not feel like you are censoring their freedom. Ultimately, you are responsible; however, discussing controls and limits with your child will help them understand you are protecting them. This may eliminate, or at least reduce, any pushback or negative comments from your child. Starting the discussions with your child from a young age will help them understand early how much you love and care for them.



Ask yourself...

- Do all of our devices have strong, unique passwords (no repeats)? Have we set up two-factor authentication where possible? Are our computers protected by firewalls?
- Is my child showing any signs of online bullying (either being bullied or bullying others)?
- Do I know how to access parental controls on my phone, tablet and computer? Should I consider setting controls to protect my children?
- How can I start a conversation with my child about the need for parental controls, strong passwords, online safety and bullying?

Establishing Expectations and Routines

In addition to establishing a learning space and ensuring your child has access to the necessary learning materials, digital devices and online learning sites, you will need to negotiate a learning routine with your child and their teacher.



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Your routine should include the following:

- **Check-ins:** Begin and end the day by checking in with your child about what is on their schedule. Moreover, check in regularly throughout the day.

- **Reflection time:** Schedule time for mental breaks to engage in reflection and rest from their learning.
- **Recess or playtime:** Just as in school, your child will need regular time to stretch their legs, get out the wiggles and rest their mind.
- **Lunch or snack breaks:** If possible, schedule lunch and snacks at times when you can be with your child to create natural times to communicate and bond. This time will also allow to you gauge how your child is doing mentally and emotionally.
- **Exercise time:** This can be combined with recess, but ensure that children, especially young ones, have time to engage in rigorous play (running around) for their physical and mental well-being (see more below).
- **Quiet time or naptime:** Schedule periods when devices are off and noise is kept to a minimum. For younger children, you can use this time for a quick nap.

Design the routines and expectations **with** your child. This will help them feel ownership of the schedule. Furthermore, discuss the importance of having a learning routine so your child understands how it will help them complete their tasks on time and improve their focus. Having a routine will also help relieve any anxiety your child (or you) may have about succeeding with ODFL. A schedule will create a sense of consistency and avoid confusion and frustration.

For younger children or those who learn best through visuals, be sure to post the learning routine somewhere that they can see it easily and refer to it regularly. Seeing the routine will also remind you, as the parent or caregiver, to check in with your child and ensure they are on task.

As you establish a daily and weekly routine with your child, carefully consider screen time (both school-related and for entertainment), time for physical movement and quiet time. The following guidelines apply:

Screen time: If your child is learning online, they may spend several hours each day on a device. That is understandable; however, the scheduling of school-based screen time should be well-thought-through. According to Professor Adrian Piccoli, Director of the Gonski Institute, “it is about making sure that children are exposed to the right technology for the right amount of time at the right time – not six or 10 hours a day or at 3 am” (Patty, 2020). Work with your child and their teacher to create a learning routine that takes into account when and how much your child is online for learning purposes.

Non-schoolwork screen time should be limited along the following age guidelines:

- 0–2 years: no screen time
 - 2–5 years: no more than one hour per day
 - 5–17 years: no more than two hours of sedentary recreational screen time per day (not including schoolwork)
- (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2023)

For many families, it will not be an issue of too much screen time, but rather of not having enough devices or Internet access to permit children to get online for their schooling. Having a well-set routine for each of your children can help you manage this challenge by identifying

- when each child needs to be using the device for *synchronous* instruction from their teacher
- how long each child may need the device to access online learning material, do research, complete an assignment, etc.

Physical movement: It is important to create a routine with plenty of time for physical movement, exercise and/or play. Recommended age guidelines for movement are as follows:

- 1–2 years: at least three hours of energetic play per day
 - 3–5 years: at least three hours of movement per day, with at least one hour of energetic play
 - 5–17 years: at least one hour of moderate to vigorous activity at least three days per week, plus several hours of light activities per day
- (Australian Department of Health and Aged Care, 2021)

Quiet time: Quiet times are periods when there is complete silence in the home. All devices that make noise (televisions, radios, cell phones, tablets, computers) are switched off. During the quiet offline time, noiseless learning activities occur – reading books, completing homework, drawing, colouring, etc. Your family can agree on when and for how long quiet time is scheduled. You can schedule quiet times when younger children will be napping, or in the afternoon for a break. Quiet times work well before bedtimes (between 19:00 and 21:00) (COL, 2021). You also may wish to consider **quiet offline time**, where no devices are used at all, giving a break from both audible and visual ‘noise’.



Ask yourself...

- Has your child’s teacher shared a daily or weekly learning routine?

- Are there specific times in the day or week when the child must be online to access instruction with their teacher?
- Is your child engaging in physical exercise or movement throughout the day? How much?
- How long is your child sitting each day? What are they doing when they are sitting?
- How many hours of screen time (school-related and for entertainment) is your child engaging in each day?
- Has the school routine been discussed and negotiated with your child so that they feel responsible for their learning?
- Have you considered having your child calculate how much time they spend doing different activities (sitting, playing, reading, browsing the Internet, social media, schoolwork) to increase their responsibility for establishing a healthy routine?
- Would scheduling daily quiet time help your child relax and feel less anxious?

See: Getting Started Guide, Appendix A

Supporting Your Child's Learning Journey

Three ways you, as a parent, can support your child's learning are:

- Managing relationships with your child, their school and teacher and relationships among family members at home.
- Providing academic support for your child through appropriate engagement in their learning activities, finding ways to build their learning autonomy and considering their specific needs based on their learning styles, gender, interests and strengths.
- Providing emotional support by encouraging and motivating your child, building their resilience and safeguarding their online experience.

Managing Relationships

Adjusting to a New Parent–Child Dynamic

One of the most evident differences when supporting your child's ODFL is adjusting to an altered parent–child relationship. While you are still the parent, you will also fulfil some roles of a teacher. You will need to establish boundaries between your role as a parent and as a parent teacher who supports and monitors their learning. Remember, though, you are not their actual teacher and are (probably) not trained as one. You still need to be a parent, while also providing learning support.

You may find that your child

- knows more about technology than you do
- knows more about their schoolwork
- resists your suggestions when establishing a learning routine.

These situations may make you feel inadequate or as if you are losing control, authority or respect as a parent. Try not to feel that way. Note that the best way to get respect is to give it first. This can be hard for a parent, but respecting your child will make them respond to you better.

Another difference may be that now you are home together in the same space all day long, when normally you would each go elsewhere for the day. This can create added stress if you 'cannot get away' from each other. Creating separate learning spaces, establishing a routine and having quiet time can help you all have the physical and emotional distance you may need to regulate your well-being.

Throughout this adjustment, the way you speak with your child will be the most important factor in your relationship. Communication may require more patience and time because your relationship is changing. A key to good communication is to be open and non-judgemental and to listen more than you speak.

As you communicate with your child, remember to

- listen well.
- maintain eye contact when speaking to them
- use positive and encouraging words
- keep your language kind, simple and straightforward
- allow your child to express their emotions openly
- remove distractions (do not look at your phone, have the television on, etc.)
- ensure your child feels safe, loved and cared for

And remember not to

- interrupt your child when they are talking
- raise your voice, shout or use harsh or insulting words
- lie, suppress or distort the truth
- be overly critical or judgemental, and not to criticise or shame

You may need to communicate and negotiate with your child in new ways that may feel different, uncomfortable or unparentlike at first. Your child may hold some information you do not – about how the instruction runs, about the lessons they are learning, about how the technology works, etc. Through open and respectful communication, you and your child can share the information you each have to offer. Showing kindness and respect to your child will make your role as a parent – and as a parent teacher – easier and more effective. It will also strengthen your loving relationship with your child. Building a strong relationship will help your child be comfortable and open when they do not understand. When you have a strong relationship, communicating will be easier, especially in difficult situations.

You can strengthen your relationship by

- showing interest in their schoolwork
- asking your child about school, what they enjoy, what is difficult, tricky or confusing
- demonstrating interest in their non-school hobbies or interests
- spending time with your child in situations that are not related to schooling (playing games, reading, cooking meals, etc.)

Try talking to your child every day, if at all possible, to nourish your relationship. You might try scheduling a specific time each day, if that helps. Create a pattern of talking even if you do not have anything particular to say. You can always just listen, which may even be better.

Communicating with Your Child’s Teacher or School

Your relationship with your child’s teacher is even more critical when your child is learning in an ODFL scenario. Establish a time to communicate regularly – as convenient, appropriate and necessary as possible to support your child’s learning, keeping in mind time availability and time constraints. Do not assume your child’s teacher will take the lead in establishing communication. Be proactive.



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Do not hesitate to reach out to your child’s teacher if you need information on the following:

- how to help your child with homework and other curriculum-related activities
- homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home
- how to assist your child to improve their skills in class and school assessments
- scheduled web-based discussions that your child needs to attend
- links to open educational resources and learning materials, online learning management systems, chat groups and video conferencing
- due dates for assignments, papers and projects

If you have older children, discuss what types of communication and information requests they should take responsibility for and when you, as the parent, will step in. This will avoid any confusion or ill feelings that you are overstepping or that your child is not being accountable (COL, n.d.).

Maintaining Your Sense of Family and Home

Learning through open, distance and flexible education, especially online learning that takes place in the home, can cause a blurred line between home and school life. It is, therefore, important to find ways to maintain a balance and a separation between the two. Ideas for establishing separate study and home spaces have been shared previously, as have ideas for designing a home learning routine.

You may also consider establishing a set of family guidelines or drafting a learning-from-home plan. Doing this as a family activity can open a discussion on how to

- separate home and school (and work)
- respect family time
- divide learning support and home tasks with your spouse or partner
- programme time for home chores and family fun
- engage grandparents or extended family for learning or support
- stay focused and avoid distractions during learning time
- schedule visits with family and friends



Ask yourself ...

- In what ways has your home life changed since your child shifted to ODFL? How do you feel about these changes?
- How can you separate learning time from family time?
- Has anything in your relationship with your child changed for the better? For the worse?
- Are you confident in communicating with your child's teacher when things are not going well?
- How can showing love and respect to your child make parenting easier for you?

- Are there times you automatically say ‘no’ to your child when you could say ‘yes’ instead? What can you do to change this? How might saying ‘yes’ more often improve your relationship with your child?

Providing Academic Support

As a parent or caregiver of a child engaged in ODFL, one of your tasks will be to provide support for your child’s learning. This support can be provided by engaging in their learning activities. You need to determine how much and when to assist and when to leave your child to work out their own solutions. Take into account your child’s unique characteristics and preferences when deciding how to support them. Be sure to ask what they need and want.

Engaging in Learning Activities

There are many easy ways to participate in your child’s learning, for example:

- Checking in about how they are doing
- Asking questions if they need help
- Explaining a new concept to them
- Inviting them to talk about what they are learning
- Having them explain a difficult concept to you
- Sitting with them as they work
- Reading along with them in their textbooks or having them read aloud to you

How much support you need to provide will depend on their age, need, preference, etc. For instance, younger children may need more assistance to follow their learning routine, access online materials, stay focused and motivated and answer questions. Older children may wish to be left alone most of the time. Do not neglect your older children, however, as offering support can help keep them motivated and on task and, at the same time, maintain open communication.

When offering to help your child, be careful to avoid the following:

- Doing their work for them. Remember, you are there to support them; they are to do the tasks.
- Hovering around them in ways that make them feel anxious or uncomfortable.
- Frustrating or annoying your child by offering assistance when they do not want it.

If you are unsure how to support your child’s learning, remember that “the best way parents can learn how to help their children is to learn from the children themselves” (COL, 2021, p. 27). So, do not be afraid to ask your child if they want help and how you can help them with their learning. Above all,

remember that each child is unique; what works for one may not work for another, so flexibility and adaptability are key.

Enabling Learner Autonomy

While supporting your child in their learning activities, you will also want to build their **autonomy** or skills at self-directing their learning. You can start this even with young children; however, older children will especially benefit from building their capacity to own their learning journey.



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To build learner autonomy, consider

- how and when to help your child
- when and how long to let your child struggle
- how to create a culture of asking for help
- how to guide your child to finding answers on their own

To help your child organise their learning, you will need to guide them to

- develop good learning habits
- manage their time effectively
- stay motivated and avoid distractions

Consider teaching your child one or more of these popular methods to increase productivity and stay motivated:

- **Time blocking:** dividing your day into ‘blocks’ or periods of time where you only focus on completing one task.
- **Task batching:** setting a specific time to do an activity, such as reading or responding to email only at 13:00 each day.
- **Day theming:** dedicating specific days for doing particular activities or studying certain subjects (note: it is better to review subjects every day to keep them fresh in your mind).
- **Time boxing:** establishing a time period (e.g., 30 minutes from 10:00 to 10:30 to do online research for a report).
(Todoist, n.d.)

These methods are simple to use and will bring about benefits such as the following:

- Promoting deep and focused work for a particular period
- Avoiding common pitfalls of multitasking, i.e., bouncing from one activity to the next but never finishing any of them
- Showing how you are using your time and what tasks take the longest
- Preventing you from spending too much time on one task (e.g., trying to make an assignment too perfect)
- Helping you plan goals and making sure you are spending time on the tasks you need to accomplish.
(Todoist, n.d.)

ODFL does not mean there is no structure. Helping your child create the structure to succeed in their learning will set them up as lifelong learners and efficient employees in the future.

Helping Girls, Helping Boys

You may notice differences in the way your children react to and approach their ODFL. This may be due to their learning styles, gender, interests and inherent strengths. Guard against stereotypes, especially gender stereotypes about how your daughter or your son learns, who misbehaves more or who is smarter.



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Comparisons are not useful, especially with your own children. Remember there is much variance among children – you may have a daughter who cannot sit still and needs more time to run around and play, while your son may sit quietly and read. Do not take stereotypes as truth. There is as much difference between boys and girls as there is among all girls and all boys.

Instead, to best support your daughter or your son, do the following:

- Consider your children individually, based on what you know about them and their ways of being and learning.
- Establish routines that provide a balance of quiet working time and playtime – and adjust these according to your individual children’s needs.
- Allow your child more time to play or run around and less time to study if they need to. Your child can be more productive during that shorter time than if you tried to force them to sit and study for longer.
- Have both male and female caregivers support both girl and boy learners. Both girls and boys will benefit from receiving support from both female and male caregivers. Fathers supporting girls’ reading is effective; it is equally effective for boys to read with their fathers, thereby

showing that men read and men study. In cultures where there are strong ideas about masculinity and femininity, you need to show that learning is a characteristic of both men and women.

- Consider the home responsibilities you assign to your children. Are you giving your girls more housework? Are your sons expected to work outside the home by a certain age? How much time is your daughter or your son engaged in work in the home or work outside the home?
- Establish a learning space for both your daughters and your sons and allow them equitable time for using technology or devices. *Equitable* means what is needed for their learning and appropriate for their instruction tasks, not based on gender, age or other considerations.

As a parent, check that you are not creating barriers to your child's learning and success by believing stereotypes or prolonging gender-based discrimination.



Ask yourself ...

- Does your child like it when you help them with their studies? With which tasks and subjects?
- Does your child ever tell you that you are getting in their way? Why might that be?
- Would your child benefit from using a time-planning technique, such as time blocking?
- How much time is your daughter or your son engaged in work at home? In work outside the home? Are you giving your daughter more housework than your son? Is your son expected to work in the fields or outside the home by a certain age?
- Which child is given access to the digital device first? Your son? Your daughter? Your older child? Your younger child? How are you making these decisions?

Providing Emotional Support

Three ways you can provide emotional support to your child are 1) encouraging and motivating your child through praise and positive affirmation, 2) building your child's resilience to face and recover from challenges and 3) safeguarding your child's digital well-being.

Encouraging and motivating your child

You may have a child who is reluctant to participate or having a hard time with their ODF learning. Offering praise and encouragement, through words and actions, can help motivate your child. Praise and encouragement will also help them feel loved, cared for and safe and will create a favourable emotional state for better learning.

Praising your child: As a parent, it is important to encourage your child, using positive words. You can do this every day – it does not require much time or any money. Encouragement also does not require you to understand technology or your child's schoolwork. All it takes is love

and sincerity – for your child will sense if you are being insincere. Here are some examples of easy phrases to use.

- Well done!
- Excellent!
- I am proud of you!
- Keep it up!
- Good job!

(COL, 2021, p. 34)

Praise is even more effective if it is specific and appreciates their efforts, for example:

- Well done *finishing your maths assignment this morning.*
- I am proud of you *for staying focused this afternoon while doing your English.*
- Good job *with your worksheets today. You are getting so good at them!*

Offering encouragement through words: Here are some handy phrases if your child is struggling with an assignment or needs motivation to keep at it:

- I know you can do it
- Come! Let me see if I can help
- Rest a bit and try again
- Do not give up
- Let's figure it out together

(COL, 2021, pp. 34–35)

Remember to praise your child and offer positive words of encouragement. “Every child wants to be praised when they are learning ... Studies have shown that children who are encouraged and praised by their parents do very well in school” (COL, 2021, p. 34).

Offering encouragement through action: Often children need more than just words. A great way to encourage and motivate your child is through active involvement in their learning. Try things like

- asking your child questions and discussing the answers together
- reading with your child; take turns reading if they are reluctant
- listening patiently and intently to what they have to say about their schoolwork and helping them talk about their successes and struggles

Stay positive: When reviewing your child's work, focus on their progress and improvement. Start with the positives and point out what they have done well or correctly. Do not be overly critical. Think about how you feel when you are getting negative comments – no one likes it! Be

positive about your child's mistakes, and make it a learning event rather than a judgement. Be sure to ask your child how they got the answers and let them explain themselves. If the answer is right, it will reinforce their thinking; if the answer is wrong your child may catch their own error, which will increase their confidence.

Encouragement and motivation in your child's schoolwork will be even more effective if they experience it in other aspects of their lives. So, even beyond schoolwork, encourage them in their other pursuits (sports, hobbies, music). This will show them that you support all aspects of their character and see them as a whole person.

Finally, remember to

- avoid the trend of saying that children are falling behind
- make the most of an unusual situation

This is especially important in exceptional learning circumstances, like during a pandemic, a prolonged illness or a weather or political emergency that may delay or interrupt schooling. Children will already be anxious that they are missing out or falling behind. It is unhelpful to reinforce their anxiety by repeating this to them.

It is true that during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a learning loss. However, the learning loss was global – happening to all children in various ways. It is important to remember that learning is a process, not a competition. Remind your child that learning is a lifelong pursuit, and there is not a finite time for them to learn and then they will have missed out. Make most of any unusual situations or circumstances that may push them to ODFL, when otherwise they would opt for face-to-face instruction in the classroom. And stay positive!

Building Your Child's Resilience

Another important aspect of providing emotional support for your child is helping to build their resilience. Resilience can be defined as the ability to be happy, successful, etc., after something difficult or bad has happened (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023) or the process of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences (American Psychological Association, 2023). While resilience is important for all aspects of your child's life, it might be especially needed when your child

is learning through ODFL, which may require increased self-motivation and stamina to persevere through challenges without a teacher nearby.

Some things you can do as a parent are:

- Encourage physical activity and exercise every day
- Help your child connect safely with friends – online or face to face
- Teach your child mindfulness (awareness of their feelings and emotions and the environment around them)
- Show your child good ways of managing stress (counting to ten, breathing deeply)
- Be kind, gracious, patient and caring, especially when your child is having difficulties

Building resilience for everyone in the family – including yourself – will help your child to face and bounce back after challenges and setbacks and will increase their awareness and maturity, which is what education is really all about.

Safeguarding Your Child’s Digital Well-being

Digital well-being is about feeling safe, comfortable, confident and in control when you are using technology and engaging in online activities. It also relates to establishing a healthy balance between how much time you spend online and offline, and what you do online and what you do offline (Open Learn, 1999–2023).

In a previous section – ***Establishing Expectations and Routines*** – recommendations for screen time by age are provided. Using these recommendations, you can help your child balance their online and offline time through good time management and intentional screen time. Intentional screen time is the time you are online for a purpose, rather than wasting time engaging in mindless activities. Often, we do not notice how much time we spend online, especially if we are not keeping track of it. Think about how fast 30 minutes pass when you are online, versus when you are doing something less pleasant! And we no longer need to be sitting at a computer. Mobile devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones make being online so easy that it is possible to be online every minute of the day, essentially living online. This can have a negative impact on our relationships and mental health. It is especially harmful to young children.

To help your child maintain a healthy relationship with digital technology, consider the following:

- Keep a diary of the time your child spends online. For older children, have them log their online time themselves. After a week, compare online time with time spent doing offline things, such as being with family or friends.
- Schedule offline activities such as going for walks, playing a sport or enjoying a hobby.
- As a family, turn the phone off (or at least turn off the ringer) or leave it in another room or locked in a drawer. Refrain from always responding immediately. Let people leave a message or send a text.
- Set aside some quiet offline time (mentioned previously). Use this time to rest and manage stress.
- Watch your child's social media use. Research shows that excessive use of social media can lead to poor mental health and well-being due to 1) a need to always be connected, 2) unfair comparisons to others and 3) a desire to display an exciting life and project a perfect online persona.
- Help your child be selective about what applications and games they download. Balance online games and activities with offline ones.
- Help your child understand that excessive screen time can result in eye strain, neck and back pain, headaches, poor sleep, bad posture, social isolation, etc.

For more information, consider taking the free online course, *Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world*, available at <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/digital-skills-succeeding-digital-world/>



Ask yourself...

- Have you offered praise or verbal encouragement to your child today? This week? How did your child react?
- Would you and/or your child benefit from enjoying some activities together to release your stress – e.g., singing, going on a walk, doing a craft, completing work around the house or working in the garden? How might doing these activities together increase resilience for yourself, your child, and your family?
- How often and for how long does your child use a digital device? How often and for how long are you online? Are you setting an appropriate example of digital well-being for your child?

Tips to Overcome Common Challenges

When Your Home Is Not Set up for Open Distance and Flexible Learning

Few homes are set up perfectly for ODFL. This was made evident when schools and businesses abruptly shifted to study- or work-from-home situations that caught many families off guard and unprepared for this ‘new normal’. Some common challenges are:

- Poor home Internet connectivity
- Limited or expensive data access
- Low levels of computer literacy (parents, children)
- No separate office or learning space

You will probably need to make some adjustments to your home set-up to support ODFL. This might mean improving your Internet access and increasing data limits, establishing a learning space for your child, etc. If it is not a situation where you must remain at home, consider whether it is possible or appropriate for your child to use a library or community space where there are desks, chairs, lights and possibly Internet services. In most circumstances, ODFL is not limited to the home. In fact, the flexibility of learning anywhere is one of its benefits.

If you must remain at home, there are many things you can do to establish a more conducive home set-up for ODFL. Consider suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Creating a Conducive Physical Environment*
- *Setting up Digital Devices and Internet Access*
- *Digital Literacy*

Keep in mind that many big companies have moved to an open office plan, where all employees sit in one large room to work. Often there are no assigned desks, and the space usage is very flexible. So, if you do not have a private room for your child to study, do not worry – you are not disadvantaging them. Just find the best way to make it work by talking to your child and seeing what makes them feel most comfortable.

When You Feel Like Your Child Is Not Respecting You or Listening to You

A very common complaint of most parents is that they feel their child is not listening to them. This can be very frustrating and lead to a breakdown of communication and trust. At first, it may seem like your

child is just trying to be bad to spite you. But in reality, they may be trying to get your attention and love, or they may be experiencing a loss of control. This is particularly true in emergency situations such as during the pandemic where everyone, even children, was feeling vulnerable and a loss of control. It is important to 1) figure out why your child is not responding to you and 2) determine if it is all the time or in particular circumstances.

McCready (2023) offers seven steps to encourage better communication with your children:

- 1) Get their attention – consider how you talk to your child:
 - a. Are you speaking calmly?
 - b. Are you near them or shouting from across the room?
 - c. Are you looking into their eyes at their eye level?
 - d. Are you giving them all your attention?
- 2) Make your communication more positive – say what you want them to do, not what they should not do.
- 3) Try not to always say ‘no’ to their suggestions. Whenever possible, say ‘yes’!
- 4) Speak in a clear, simple and short way – do not over-complicate what you say.
- 5) Establish positive expectations; thank them for what they do – even before they have done it.
- 6) Make sure your child has understood you – have them summarise what you said.
- 7) Speak without judgement; make neutral comments and observations, not negative ones.
Furthermore, let the child show some initiative and let them control some things.
(McCready, 2023)

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Understanding Your New Parenting Role*
- *Adjusting to a New Parent–Child Dynamic*

When You Do Not Understand the Child’s Work, and They Know It

There are few situations more challenging than when your child needs help with their schoolwork and you do not understand the assignment. If this occurs, first, admit that you do not understand. Pretending to know what you are doing (and failing to help) will only break the trust with your child. Instead, admit you are also unsure. This can help build your child’s confidence that you will always be honest. It may also help them feel less distressed that they do not know what to do – after all, a trusted adult is confused as well.

Now, try to work through the instructions together and see if you can figure it out. If this does not work, seek help from family (other children or spouse). Remember to encourage your child to ask their teacher or other students for support. Knowing how and when to ask questions is key to being a good learner. Also, keep an open mind towards assisting your children with their homework, and evaluate what ‘helping’ means. Is it

- encouraging them when they feel stuck?
- knowing the answers and teaching them the concepts?
- guiding them to find their own answers through various sources of help?

Remember, you are not their teacher; you do not need to know how to do their work. Rather, you need to help them find answers. Try to avoid falling into the expectation that you should be able to do their work. Acknowledge that schoolwork is a specific activity – that ways of teaching concepts change over time. You can best maintain your status as a parent by acknowledging that you do not know how to do their assignment and, instead, helping them to find their own answers. Remember that learning to learn is more important than knowing all the answers.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Providing Academic Support*
- *Enabling Learning Autonomy*

When Your Child Is More Computer-Literate than the Adult

Your child, especially an older child, may be more computer-savvy than you are. As a parent, resist the urge to feel insecure about this. Remember that your child has used technology all their life – you may not have had the same exposure. Instead, ask your child to explain what they are doing, let them show you some tricks. Contrary to what you may think, letting them teach you will strengthen your relationship with your child, not cause you to lose authority.

In addition, you can build your own confidence and knowledge in technology – your own digital literacy. For instance, you can take a free course here: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/digital-skills-succeeding-digital-world/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Digital Literacy*
- *Digital Citizenship*

When Your Child Refuses to Get Off Their Device

You may find that your child is spending most of their time online; however, they are not always doing schoolwork during these times. One suggestion is to negotiate device time limits with your child. First, try asking them how many minutes per day they think they should be on their phone. You may wish to share with them the guidelines for onscreen time for various age groups, provided in the section *Establishing Expectations and Routines*, and hear their thoughts about it. You might be surprised by how many (or few) minutes they suggest.

They also might be surprised to discover how many minutes or hours they are spending online. Most mobile devices have a way to tell you how much time is spent using each application. For instance, on Samsung smartphones, look under *Settings, Digital Well-being and Parental Controls* to see how much time has been spent on various applications. You can also set screen time goals there. Setting these goals with your child will make this process less confrontational and teach them responsibility.

Remember, just telling your child to get off their device will not work ... what will they do instead? Often, mindless scrolling is due to boredom; adults are guilty of this as well! Help your child to substitute excessive screen time with meaningful offline activities (face-to-face socialising, reading, sport). Ask your child to help come up with other ways to spend their time.

You may not agree with your child on their suggested amount of screen time. And coming up with an acceptable limit may involve going back and forth. Resist the urge to use your authority as a parent to dictate the amount. Instead, work with them. It may take longer (and feel frustrating), but it will pay off in the long run.

Together, consider the suggestions under the following guide section:

- *Establishing Expectations and Routines*

When You Have More than One Child Doing Open Distance and Flexible Learning

Many families have to balance the demands of having two or more children doing ODFL. This was especially common during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a parent, you know your children and will have a sense of which children will need the most help. Setting up a family routine, including time slots for supporting each child, will help set guidelines for how much time to dedicate to each child. Be careful, though, as a routine may also make evident that some children are getting more time than others.

Communicate with the whole family about why each child is getting the time and support they receive. Having multiple children learning at home can be a benefit to you. You can have them help one another. Just as children play (and fight) together, they can also learn together. Older children may enjoy teaching their younger siblings, and this could bring out their natural talents. Younger children will enjoy the positive attention they receive from their older siblings.

It is probable that you will have fewer devices than children, and they will need to learn to share. This is similar to other common goods in the house – toys, books, games, the television, etc. Establish sharing as normal – resist the urge to apologise that your family does not have more devices. Instead, focus on the blessing that you have the devices you do. Have the family agree to a schedule for who uses the devices when, similar to checking a book out of the library, borrowing a tool from a neighbour or renting a vehicle. Sharing is an important life skill.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Establishing Expectations and Routines*
- *Maintaining Your Sense of Family and Home*
- *Engaging in Learning Activities*

When Your Child Is New to Formal Schooling

You may have a young child who is starting their education journey through ODFL never having experienced face-to-face learning before. This child will not know how to ‘do’ school – sit still, follow routines, complete learning tasks, etc. You will have to show them how. Begin in small increments of no more than 15 to 20 minutes per activity, possibly less, depending on your child’s temperament. It will

take a while for a child to learn to sit still; so, be sure to let them get out the wiggles before they start. Allow lots of play time. Do not take learning it too seriously and do not make the day overwhelming.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide section:

- *Establishing Expectations and Routines*

When You Are a Single Parent

First, try to release yourself from the guilt that you are not doing enough. All parents feel this, and you will feel it even more as the sole caregiver. Remember, you are doing your best, and the most important thing is for your child to feel safe, cared for and loved.

Second, ask for help whenever you can – from family, friends, neighbours and teachers. You do not have to do everything – delegate! That is what the big boss does at work – they assign work to others – and you are the big boss of the home! Do you have older children who can help? Give them responsibilities. They may grumble at first, but deep down they will feel pride in contributing.

Establish a good home routine to keep everyone on track. Post it in a place everyone can see because communication will be essential. Moreover, depending on your child's age, let them take more responsibility for their learning. Your job as a parent is to nurture your child into a responsible adult. They are probably more capable of doing things (and willing to help) than you suspect.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Understanding Your New Parenting Role*
- *Establishing Expectations and Routines*
- *Enabling Learner Autonomy*
- *Adjusting to a New Parent–Child Dynamic*

When You Are Working Online from Home as Well

The pandemic was a unique time when many families were juggling a home life with parents working and children studying online. There may be other situations where you work from home and your child

is studying remotely from home. In such situations, two issues are key: 1) setting up spaces for working and learning and 2) establishing a good home routine with

- a separation of home and school or work times
- regular breaks for meals, rest, physical activity and entertainment
- times to come together and times to be alone, for both study or work and rest or play
- times when your child can ask you questions
- focused quiet periods

You may wish to create a visual to indicate activities for instance, moving a curtain, a picture or a household item one way or another to signal quiet time or talking time. Consider taking break time together to help with focus and motivation. For instance, you can practise ‘time blocking’, where you set aside an hour or so to work, followed by a break for a snack or a walk together.

Communication will be important as you negotiate how long for each time block and when to schedule them.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Creating a Conducive Learning Environment*
- *Establishing Expectations and Routines*
- *Maintaining Your Sense of Family and Home*
- *Enabling Learner Autonomy*
- *Encouraging and Motivating Your Child*

When You Are Working Outside the Home

You (and your spouse or other caregivers) may work outside the home while your older child is learning online at home. (Note: you should not leave young children home alone to study.) As you will not be home to monitor and support your child, you will need to take care to

- establish a routine
- communicate learning and behaviour expectations (calling to check in; when to open the front door; if friends are allowed over)
- make sure your child is safe online
- help your child balance their time on and off their devices
- help your child set up social time with family and friends so they do not feel isolated

Communicating with your child and building a trusting relationship will be very important.

Consider the suggestions under the following guide sections:

- *Establishing expectations and routines*
- *Communicating with your child's teacher*
- *Enabling learner autonomy*

Remote Learning in Diverse Circumstances

Supporting your child's ODFL can be extra challenging given the specific situation. Below are three instances where supporting your child may need additional resources.

Supporting Children with Disabilities

A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the [child] with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions) ... Although "[children] with disabilities" sometimes refers to a single population, this is actually a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs. Two [children] with the same type of disability can be affected in very different ways. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see. (United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Disabilities may affect a child's

- vision
- movement
- thinking
- remembering
- learning
- communication
- hearing
- mental health
- social relationships

For some children with a disability, ODFL is easier. For instance, ODFL will allow them to learn at their own pace, rewatch instructional videos and learn in a comfortable and known space. For children who were mistreated at school, felt shy or had difficulty managing the physical school space, learning from home is a blessing. For other children, learning remotely will be more challenging. They may not have access to school aids or assistive technology or they may feel increasingly alienated without the face-to-

face social aspects of school. Your child with a disability will have their own unique experience with ODFL.

Here are some areas to consider when supporting your child:

- Physical or movement
 - *Positive:* The child does not have to travel to school or move around a campus that is not accessible; the child may be more comfortable at home with facilities they are used to; the child may avoid unwanted looks, pointing, bullying or harassment.
 - *Negative:* The child's school may be better set up for accessibility and provide access to **assistive devices**, special keyboards, etc.
- Hearing or speech
 - *Positive:* The child may have greater control over the volume, be able to access applications that turn text to speech and vice versa and can replay videos. Learning materials may have more visuals.
 - *Negative:* The child may miss visual facial cues if lessons do not have video; teacher may not be able to read the child's face for frustration or misunderstanding.
- Dyslexia
 - *Positive:* The child may have more time for reading activities and not be in the presence of other children who may distract or inhibit them.
 - *Negative:* Loss of one-to-one attention provided by the school.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
 - *Positive:* Potential for a more varied learning routine or schedule that reflects the needs of the student.
 - *Negative:* Students with ADHD may have trouble sitting still and looking at the screen for long periods and may miss hands-on classroom activities and school play equipment.

At school, your child may have had support from **assistive devices and technologies**. These are special equipment and technology designed to help students with disabilities to access learning:

- computer hardware and software or applications (e.g., closed captioning on Zoom calls)
- hearing, vision and equipment for physical access (e.g., hearing aids, Braille books)
- specialised furniture (e.g., higher or lower desks or chairs)
- low-tech, adaptive tools (e.g., lined paper, pencil grips, highlighters)
(New Zealand Ministry of Education, n.d.)

As a parent supporting ODFL, you may not have access to these forms of support or other accommodations. This is in addition to the disruption of routines and the loss of physical support from

aids at school. Success in ODFL will depend to a large extent on you as the parent or caregiver and whether you have the time and temperament to guide your child.

Remember, there are some positives to having your child learn from home:

- You may be better able to address the needs of your child – this does not always happen (well) at school.
- You have more control over your child’s routine, and it may be simpler because you do not have to go out.
- Your child may get more one-on-one learning instruction than they would at school. Even just a couple hours with your child may be more than what they are getting at school in a classroom with 20 to 30 children and a teacher needing to give attention to all of them.
- You may need to sit with your child, help them print their assignments, keep them motivated and engaged and help them with assignments (more than just regular homework).
(Santamaria-Lopez, 2023)

As a parent or caregiver, you may become exhausted emotionally and/or physically, so allow yourself to take breaks and do not over-expect what you will be able to do. The most important thing is to keep a caring environment where your child feels safe and is seen and heard. Remember to reach out to support networks, hotlines or resource organisations that can provide support either in person or through online groups.



Ask yourself ...

- Does your child have a physical disability? A learning disability?
- Was your child receiving assistance or accommodations when learning in a face-to-face classroom situation?
- Is your child struggling because they are no longer receiving assistance or accommodations like before?
- Do you have access to assistive devices appropriate for their need?
- Is your child happier and/or doing better with ODFL than they were when learning face to face?
- Have you spoken to your child’s teacher or school to request assistance or additional resources that you may need?
- Is there anyone else you can talk to for help (e.g., family, friend, neighbour, community organisation)?

Navigating the Multilingual Home

The language used for your child's learning is called the *language of instruction* or the *medium of instruction*. This language may be different from that spoken at home or in your community. If your child is learning using a language you do not know or do not speak well, it may be challenging for you to help with their academic work. However, you can still support them in many other ways, using the language you speak at home. For instance, you can still help with establishing the learning routine, providing encouragement and motivation and helping our child build resilience and autonomy.

You can also help explain concepts in your home language, even if your child is learning them in the language of instruction. Your child will benefit from having concepts explained in both languages, as this will increase their comprehension by allowing them to hear two versions of the same explanation. You can also help your child's learning by having them explain to you in your language the things they are learning in the language of instruction. Research shows that this is a very good way of strengthening your child's comprehension and solidifying their learning.



Ask yourself ...

- Is your child learning in a language that you do not know how to speak, understand, read or write?
- Do you have difficulty communicating with your child's teacher or school due to language differences?
- Are you having difficulty helping your child on their learning journey because of language differences?
- Is there someone in your family or community who can help you address these communication challenges?
- What can you do to support your child that does not need to be done in the language of instruction?

Learning Remotely in Emergency Contexts

Your child may participate in ODFL out of preference or out of need. In the pandemic, ODFL became a norm out of necessity as many schools were closed. While most schools have returned to face-to-face classroom instruction, there is always the possibility of a return to ODFL in response to tropical storms,

earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, climate disasters, war, other forced displacement or new pandemics.

ODFL during and after emergency situations brings about particular challenges. For instance, you and your child may be experiencing the effects of psychological, physical or emotional trauma, insecurity and a lack of basic necessities such as food and shelter – let alone Internet access.

If you find yourself in an emergency situation where ODFL might occur, remember the following:

- Set reasonable expectations about what can be done
- Balance emotions, relationships and academic achievement
- Re-establish social connections (apart from the online coursework)
- Embrace the benefits of free reading and learning through unstructured play
- Create a daily routine to re-establish a sense of normalcy
- Use the suggestions in this guide to build resilience in your child and in yourself
- Do not increase your child’s anxiety by telling them they are going to fall behind

With ODFL during an emergency situation, your child may not receive as much instruction from their teachers. And they may not have easy access to learning materials. Remember that the point of education is to learn how to learn. Your child can learn many things outside of regular schoolwork that will keep their minds engaged and growing and make them ready to return to their coursework when possible.

In an emergency, even if there is access to technology and appropriate learning activities, there still might be barriers to access such as a “lack of motivation and competing priorities” (UNESCO, 2023, p. 40). Anxiety and a feeling of insecurity or fear may distract your child from their learning. In this instance, resist pushing your child too hard or making them feel shame or anxiety that they are not taking advantage of these learning activities. Remember that the emotional and physical health of your child is more important than completing a course of study.

Lastly, remember that, as parents and guardians, you may be feeling stressed and anxious as well. Be sure to address your emotional well-being before trying to support your child.



Ask yourself ...

- Are there learning resources or books available to keep my child's mind engaged?
- Can I teach my child useful knowledge other than what they would learn at school?
- What am I doing to regulate my emotions and cope with the situation?
- Is my child responding well to ODFL or are there other factors (emotional, physical, mental) that are distracting them?
- What can I do to make my child feel loved and secure during this time?

Appendices

Getting Started Guide

- 1) Does your child have a regular (and, if possible, a dedicated) space to do their studying?
 - a. Is the space free from distractions (noise, foot traffic)?
 - b. Does the space have appropriate light, ventilation, temperature?
 - 2) Does your child have a visibly posted study schedule that matches the school or teacher expectations and that is agreed upon by both you and your child?
 - a. Online tasks (classroom chats, pre-recorded videos/lessons, research, etc.)
 - b. Offline tasks (textbook-based assignments, worksheets, etc.)
 - c. Free reading
 - d. Creative time (music, drawing, sport)
 - e. Breaks (morning, afternoon, lunchtime, stretching, toilet, free playtime)
 - 3) Does your child have a digital device (computer, tablet, mobile phone) or access to an appropriate device at regular and appropriate times?
 - 4) Is the digital device set up per the instructions of the school?
 - a. Software downloaded
 - b. Bookmarks to the learning management system URL
 - c. Learning resources downloaded and saved where they can be easily retrieved
 - d. Passwords set (and recorded elsewhere)
 - e. If resources are provided through flash or hard drives, does the device have appropriate ports or cables to connect with these?
 - f. If possible, is the device blocked from distractions (games, YouTube)?
 - g. If possible, is child or age protection enabled to prevent access to unsuitable websites?
 - h. If possible, is the device set to register the amount of active time on various websites?
 - 5) Is there a drawer or box where learning materials, devices and drives can be safely stored?
 - 6) Are assignment deadlines (dates/times) posted in a visible location (for the student/parent)?
 - 7) Is there an online group that you, as the parent, should join to communicate with the teacher and receive information regarding assignments, student progress, grades on assignments, etc. (e.g., Google Classroom, a school website)
 - 8) Do you, as the parent, understand your responsibility for providing resources or support to your child's learning or assignments? Are you comfortable with the amount of time and/or money you are expected to provide?
 - 9) Have you spoken with the teacher and with your child and agreed to an approach for communicating with the teacher when your child has questions or is otherwise stuck?
- (Adapted from Bates, 2021)
-

Additional Resources

Here are links to additional resources that you may find helpful:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/digital-skills-succeeding-digital-world/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

Free course – Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world (24 hrs of study, introductory level)
Develops confidence in and skills for navigating work, study and life online

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/4-7s-website/>

Website with interactive activities for children aged 4–7 years

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/talking-about-difficult-topics/>

Online resource for talking with your children about difficult topics

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/types-bullying/bullying-cyberbullying/>

Advice for helping your child in cases of bullying and cyberbullying

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/>

Information on inappropriate online content and how to protect your child

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/#guides>

Online safety advice for parents

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/articles/cyberbullying/>

Information and links regarding cyberbullying

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/safeguarding-children/>

Age-based advice for safeguarding children

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/>

Setting parental controls for all of your devices

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/communication-social-networking/>

Online communication and social networking advice

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/protecting-your-computer/>

How to protect your computer

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/protecting-yourself/>

How to protect yourself on the Internet

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/smartphones-tablets/>

How to protect smartphones and tablets

<https://www.samsung.com/us/support/answer/ANS00079036/>

How to set up a hotspot on a Samsung phone or tablet

<https://au.pcmag.com/mobile-phones/29992/how-to-turn-your-phone-into-a-wi-fi-hotspot>

How to set up a hotspot on your iPhone or Android phone

<https://www.hp.com/us-en/shop/tech-takes/what-is-tethering#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20benefits%20of,that%20are%20within%20close%20range.>

More information on tethering

<https://www.connectionsacademy.com/support/resources/article/tips-for-establishing-online-learning-routines/>

Establishing a learning routine for online study

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/digital-distraction-new-report-raises-concerns-about-online-learning-20200415-p54k0l.html>

A discussion of the risks of screen time and online learning

<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/too-much-time-screens>

Information on age-appropriate screen time

<https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians>

Physical activity or movement guidelines

<https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/time-blocking#time-blocking-variations>

Information on time blocking

<https://blog.rescuetime.com/time-blocking-101/>

Information on time blocking

<https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/one-simple-strategy-help-make-homework-time-easier>

For tips on taking a positive approach to reviewing school assignments with your child

<https://www.pathfinder.health/post/helping-your-child-develop-resilience-using-the-7cs-model#>

Building resilience in your children

<https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids/#activities>

Mindfulness activities for children and families

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jppi.12456>

Parents helping a child with disability learn at home during Covid-19: Experiences from Slovenia and Canada

<https://www.interdisciplinaryinsights.org/api/v1/articles/18943-students-with-disabilities-and-online-learning-in-a-pandemic.pdf> (free online source, opens as a pdf document)

Student with disabilities and learning online in a pandemic

Suggested video: Helping families to manage and support home learning

(<https://www.acs-schools.com/parents-guide-distance-learning>)

- Difference between face-to-face and online learning – all in the same space together (at 30 sec)
- Structured and collaborative approach – establish a family plan (at 1.15 min)
- Motivating your child – joining in with some of your child’s learning (at 2.15 min)
- Trying to help your children – finding the balance between too much, too little (at 3.40 min)
- Supporting your child’s learning habits – ask your children (at 5.20 min)
- When you are not as technologically savvy as your children – ask them for help (at 6.38 min)
- Getting your child off their devices – negotiate the amount of time together (at 8.0 min)
- Multiple children of different ages – having them help one another, learning together (at 9.0 min)

Suggested reading: Parent’s guide to distance learning <https://www.acs-schools.com/parents-guide-distance-learning>

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