



## AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST EPISODE 32: COPING WITH HOME INSTRUCTION FOR FAMILIES & EDUCATORS

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode32>

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am Chris Reeve, your host. What a strange time this is to live through. For those who are listening in the future, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and most schools have closed to keep everyone at home and practice social distancing. I don't know about you, but when this is "over" I don't ever want to put those two words together again.

### Where Are We?

Many, if not most of us, are being told to stay home. We are working from home. And we are schooling from home. Teachers have made a ginormous pivot to teaching in classrooms to teaching online or providing written materials for students to work on at home. Parents have become the facilitators and sometimes the teachers of their children's education, while still trying to work from home. And some are doing all this while also still working outside the home and trying to find childcare...much less educational support. And we are doing this with the background of the largest healthcare crisis we have seen in our lifetimes.

### Distance Learning is Stressful

The thing that makes this home schooling so hard, I think, is that no one asked for it. There are many students who are home schooled or home schooled with online learning and support from certified teachers. But that isn't what happened here. As I talked about in [episode 31](#), parents didn't sign on to be facilitators for online or distance learning. And many have commitments that make this difficult. And the teachers didn't ask to be distance instructors. So I wanted to take a quick break from strategies to make distance learning work and talk a little about ways to cope, whether you are an educator or a family member, when you are thrust into this world of distance learning.



Let's get started.

## How to Cope with Distance Learning (These Days)

As I said, most of us did not ask for this situation but it's what we have. And I want to say that I am so impressed with how both teachers and families have been managing this. I think both are doing amazing things that deserve to be recognized. Both groups also need our support to get through it.

## Tips for Coping with Distance Learning for Families

Let me start with families. Some families choose to homeschool and use online learning for their children. Others have home schooling or distance education thrust upon you. It's not how you may have chosen to educate your child, but it 's what we have at the moment.


It brings with it a lot of concerns and frustrations...and it may ratchet up the tension in the house a bit as parents become the facilitator or the teacher. There are some major differences between choosing to homeschool your child (with or without an online component). The primary one being that if you chose it, you made a commitment to being the educator of one type or another. And if it was thrust upon you....it may not be something you have the time or energy to address.

You also may be running into situations that are difficult to manage. Our students might not understand why Mom or Dad is suddenly the teacher. They may not want to work at home. And you may feel at a loss about how to present the material coming home. The situation is not ideal, but let me start with some ideas that might be helpful for families.

## 5 Tips for Home Schooling for Families

### I. Take it easy on yourself.

You are getting a ton thrown at you at once. You might be working from home and trying to do home school. Plus you might be looking for childcare so you can continue working at your job and home school may not be on



your radar. That's OK. Let's get through this. And then we'll figure it out. And that really seems to be where we're at at the moment. I recognize that isn't the equivocal definite answer that we'd all like about how IEP s and things like that are going to be addressed. But at the moment, that's where we are.

## 2. Your Child Might Not Take to a Parent as a Teacher

It's not at all uncommon that your child will have some difficulty with the idea of doing school work at home. It's not you. That's normal. We are all different with our family than we are with other people. I always say family members have a history that teachers don't have. Teachers are there a certain part of the day; families are there forever.

I am a family member of an individual with autism. And I will tell you, there are many ways that she and I interact, that would never enter into a classroom situation with other people, because it's 50 years of history. So that learning history is strong for both you and your child. And that's okay. Don't beat yourself up about it.


## 3. Back up and Start Small

If you are struggling with anything, back up and start small. Don't start with the whole lesson sent home at once. Start by just doing 1 activity each day. When that becomes a habit, add another.

## 4. Do Fun Things Before Teaching

Do fun activities with your child that they enjoy before you sit down to work with them. This helps students adjust and want to interact. If you can bring the fun activity to the area you plan to work in, even better. Then they won't see it as "work" as much. That's why if you can build it around cooking activities or nature walks or scavenger hunts in the house or games you play, that's a really good way at this time to do that type of learning. Because our students will accept that as part of a normal household routine more effectively.

I know it's tempting to say let's get the work done, and then we'll do something fun. And sometimes that will work with our students. But many



times we will get them to engage in work activities more effectively if we start with something that's engaging and fun. This helps the student adjust and want to interact with you.

## 5. Ask for Help

That's what they are there for. That is the advantage of you're not on your own. You shouldn't be on your own. Your child has a teacher. And if they are expecting you to be doing any kind of distance learning, they should be available to you in different ways.

I know many teachers have requirements that they reach out to families a certain number of times a week. Many of them are trying to make contact with their students so they can touch base with them as well. So don't be afraid to reach out and ask, nobody's ever done this before. There is no right or wrong. No guilt. There should not be any guilt. I know, there's always guilt.


But we, we just have to get through it. And help is how we can do that. We are a community and we can help. One of the things that you may want to do is if you're listening to this in real time, on Tuesday (March 31, 2020), I will be doing a [Facebook Live for the Autism Society of America](#), along with my friend Mark Ellison, who runs the college Autism Support Program at Marshall University.

And we'll be talking about homeschooling and what it might look like. Hopefully answering some questions that people have. And if you're not listening to this before we've done it live, I'm sure the recording will be on their page.

## Helping Educators Cope with Distance Learning

So now let's talk about educators. In the [Special Educator Academy](#) we have a thread one of our members started about positive things we have learned from this experience. It's much more meaningful and less sappy than it may sound--really. What I have found so amazing about educators' reactions to this situation is that I almost never see any of them say "this isn't fair" or "I can't believe this is expected of us."

Instead, like our amazing healthcare workers in these days, educators are picking up the baton and running with it. They have pivoted on a dime with a



couple days notice to teach in a whole new way. To throw out their lesson plans for what may be the rest of the year and figure out how to teach without their whiteboards, their visuals and even their books. Many of them had school cancelled while they weren't in the building...and are not allowed back in the building to get any materials.

## Educators' Challenges

What I hear them lament about is not the time it is taking to learn new learning platforms, or trying to figure out how to meet IEP goals remotely (although this does concern them). I hear them being sad that they don't get to see "their kids." Because face it, our students are our kids too.

I see them making car parades through their students' neighborhoods to tell them that they miss them and deliver materials. They say how happy they are when they get a face-to-face session going and get to see their students' faces.

## Tips for Coping as an Educator


### I. Take it Easy on Yourself

Don't feel like you have to do everything at once. Start small...give parents 1 thing..then add to it. That will help keep them from being overwhelmed as well.

### 2. Check In with Families with Specific Questions

Check in with the families of your students and see how they are doing. Set up a regular call or video check in to answer questions. And during that time ask them specific questions like:

1. How is X responding to you for teaching?
2. Are you running into any problems that are making it hard to get through the material?
3. What does your schedule look like each day? Is there something I can help you with there?
4. Are there directions that I can help clarify for you? Because remember, we're used to following our own lesson plans as



teachers, we're not often used to just handing them to somebody and expecting them to always be able to follow them.

5. Any technical issues with the computer or the internet?

Asking those specific questions can really help to get the information that will allow you to help a family. And it may come up by a call questions they didn't even realize that they had.

### 3. Tailor Interventions to Home Schooling

Remember that this is going to be an adjustment for the families and for the student. Try to make sure that strategies you share for them are ones that will fit into the home environment. For instance, maybe you have all of your staff trained in how to ignore their child's attention seeking behavior and it's reduced specifically. But that may not be the case at home. Parents may not know how to do that, or they might not be able to get the siblings to understand. So, look for another solution.

Recognize that when parents are telling you that something isn't working, they are not resisting the solutions that you're providing. They may need ones that are tailored to their particular situation. The way that families handle behavior and are able to handle behavior will always be different than school. We have to think outside the box in this case, to help figure out how it's going to work in that setting. And your strategies may not always be exactly what is needed to transfer.

### 4. Set Boundaries on Your Time.

Use something like [Remind](#) or regularly scheduled contact with families so that there are specific times you have "office hours" and are available. With families' work schedules and everything going on, their school schedule may be slightly different than your expectations. So it's helpful for them to know when they can reach out, how to reach you and when they can expect to hear back from you. You don't need to be answering questions because your phone woke you up in the middle of the night. It's important that you take time for yourself and it's important that you take time for your family.





## 5. Ask for Help

You are not in this alone. Every teacher in this country, whether his/her school has let out or not is thinking about doing something like this, if not doing it. Reach out to your district for guidance. Social media may be a great place to commiserate and get ideas and empathy, but it can't substitute for advice from the district specifically about their expectations of this experience. And as I talked about in [Episode 31](#), go easy on the districts because they're still trying to build the plane while it flies as well.

If you need more ideas, reach out to [our Facebook group](#). I'm trying to make sure that I spend time in there every day. And we've got a number of large increasing number of educators with some really great ideas of things that they're doing. And if you're a member of the [Special Educator Academy](#), reach out to the community or just email me. We are all here to help. And you are not in this by yourself.

You don't have to have all the answers; none of us do. So if you reach out on social media, if you reach out in the academy, I can't guarantee I have the answers. I've never said I do. But I'm more than willing to brainstorm. If you're a special educator, if you are a Special Educator Academy member, we do have increasing training on distance learning. We just posted a new one on planning distance learning. And we have lots and lots of resources in the community as well as social stories to help some of our students. If you are a member, definitely look for those or email me if you can't find them.

And, if you're not a member, [come join us for a 7-day trial](#) and find out if it's something that's for you. I will be back next week to talk some more probably about distance learning and coping with some of these things.