

How to Break It to Your Kids They Will Be Remote Learning This Fall

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With school districts all over Illinois and the country shifting to remote learning to start the school year this fall - and many parents opting to enroll their kids in remote learning if their school offers a choice - families are undertaking difficult conversations about what the next few months will look like. Many kids are disappointed or downright distraught at the notion of another school year with remote learning, and parents are equally stressed about the prospect.

So how can parents have this difficult conversation with their children, knowing they will likely be upset at the news that they will not be returning to in-person school?

While the conversation will vary greatly depending on the age of the child, there are some universal tips when it comes to having hard conversations.

- **Know the Why:** First, make sure you understand your decision. Your child may not like it, but part of parenting includes making hard decisions and having hard

conversations.

- **Manage your Emotions.** Tough challenges aren't going away and they are often very difficult to discuss. This can leave us feeling anxious, unsure, frustrated, or angry. How you navigate having a challenging conversation is a key difference maker as to whether people feel valued. The only way to become better at navigating these conversations is through continued practice. So take a deep breath, and start talking.
- **Don't Assume You Know Everything.** When it comes to challenging conversations, the biggest mistake is assuming we know all we need to know to understand and explain a situation. The key is to shift your thinking from "I need to explain myself or deliver a message" to "I need to listen and learn more about what is going on." Ask your child how they are feeling. You may be surprised.
- **Remember SARA.** When human beings have challenging conversations and receive difficult feedback or news, there is a four-stage response that is hard to avoid. SARA stands for - Shock, Anger, Resentment, Acceptance. These are natural reactions and you may want to consider giving your child space to process these stages before you jump to next steps.

- **Don't delay.** It is easy to avoid challenging conversations in hopes the situation will improve but delaying the conversation takes a toll on you. The longer you wait, the longer it takes for your child to process the information. While it might be tempting to put the conversation off until the night before school starts, this won't give your child time to process the news.
- **Have the conversation in person, and consider the location and timing.** Don't text your teen with the news. Make sure that your child isn't hungry, tired or stressed about something else.
- **Rely on scripts.** Below are some suggested responses and ways to move through the difficult conversation in a productive way.

Conversation	Key Messaging/Scripts
Pre-Warning of a Potential Negative Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I need to give you a heads up about X - It is not yet clear what, if anything, the impact is. I wanted to make you aware so we can anticipate - In the event X happens, there are XX things we - What approach makes the most sense to you?
Communicating Bad News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are 3 things I need to communicate to you - There is an issue with XYZ - The anticipated impact of this issue is A & B - There are XX potential solutions to (remediate/issue, and I need your input to select the best p - I appreciate your (willingness to listen, your un - etc.)
Responding to Objections/Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge/Affirm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank you for sharing this. - This is an important issue. - I'm so glad you brought this up. - Ask Clarifying Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help me understand your concern/obje - What is behind it? - Help me understand why it is a concern - What alternatives are you willing to cor - What would be a reasonable alternativ - Advance Alternative Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If I were able to do X, would that get us - concern/objection/issue? - May I suggest XX alternative(s)...

Many of us are having hard conversations that we don't want to have right now. But that doesn't make them any less necessary. After breaking the news to your child that they won't be returning to their school building this fall as planned, they may need some time to digest the news. Make sure to check-in with them after talking to them about it. Their emotions, needs, and concerns will likely change in the days and weeks ahead.