



eLuma
online therapy

Best Practices for Educating Online

Disclaimer: It is important to understand that live, online learning is not a plug and play solution. It takes planning and preparation. You should use the systems that you're familiar with to get up and running for temporary or extended closures. This guide will walk you through best practices, teaching strategies, and tips and tricks for delivering high quality instruction and therapy online with a quick turn around.

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Prepare for your first session from home

Technology

In preparation for your first session at home, we recommend the following to ensure the greatest success:

- A working laptop or computer (iPads or tablets are good backup options)
- High speed Ethernet connection (Wifi can work but is less dependable)
- Webcam (Built-in or standalone)
- Headset (Optional but recommended)

Software

Create an account with Zoom video conferencing and download to your computer: [click here](#). Additional [tips and tricks](#) you should consider. If you don't use Zoom, make sure you use a platform that is HIPAA compliant.

Environment

Ensure that you have an environment that meets the following requirements:

- Quiet, well-lit home office or workspace (if possible since you may have children at home during this time).
- Lighting is best with a window or natural lighting in front of you.
- Background that is free of unnecessary distractions.
- Appropriately sized desk and chair (you'll be sitting more than you're used to).
- Second computer monitor, keyboard, and mouse for easier virtual classroom management and productivity.

Apparel and Recommendations

We recommend considering the following:

- Wear the same professional apparel you would if you were working onsite.
- You will be sitting more than usual, so have a lap blanket, a warm pair of socks or slippers, or even a space heater.
- Create a schedule for work, breaks and lunch - and stick to it.
- Take care of yourself. Get up every 30-60 minutes, walk around, stay hydrated, and focus your eyes on objects more than 20 feet away.
- Be patient with yourself and others.

Conduct your first session from home

What you need to do

Communication with your students while working with them from a distance is critical. Don't underestimate the need to over-communicate on the phone or in an email. Keep these best practices in mind:

1. If you are going to hold *group* sessions, make sure you've provided prior written notice to parents so you can uphold FERPA.
2. Create a schedule that both you and your student can see (we suggest a shared calendar on Google or Outlook).
3. Send reminders prior to a live, online session.
4. Communicate, communicate, communicate by email, phone, or chat application.
5. Prepare your materials and avoid spending time during the session searching for materials. Practice sharing materials ahead of time. See recommended resources under instructional strategies for live, online learning below.
6. After the session is complete, document your data and notes thoroughly in your district's digital note-taking or IEP system.
7. Send a follow up email to the family with any homework assignments, deadlines, and next session date and time.

What your student(s) need to do

Students should have a working computer, high speed Internet connection, webcam, headset (optional), and adult supervision. They should also have your calendar invite or therapy schedule handy, and in those details you should provide them with these instructions to join a live, online session.

To join our live, online session:

1. At the time of our scheduled session, please make sure you have a quiet place with a working computer, high speed internet, webcam, and headset (optional).
2. Open Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox Internet browser and click https://zoom.us/my/insert_your_zoom_meeting_id_number
3. You may be prompted to allow access to your microphone and camera for the Zoom virtual classroom. Please make sure to click Allow when prompted.

Instructional strategies for live, online learning

1. Engage your students with personality, passion, and enthusiasm

Engaging students online is different from engaging students with your physical presence in a classroom. Online educators should be engaging from the get go using enthusiastic body language, expression, and tone of voice. It's also important to have your materials prepared beforehand in order to keep the pace moving forward and to avoid downtime while you search for content. At the same time, everyone is learning, and it's okay to make mistakes.

Establishing your presence will signal to students that you are visible, available, and you'll be welcoming them to a new learning environment. Remember, students may be nervous attending online classes for the first time, and you can ease their stress with an enthusiastic and optimistic attitude.

2. Set clear expectations

Provide students with a very clear set of expectations up front. These expectations should include what they can expect for their class schedule, modes of communication and frequency, homework and activities, and the conduct students should display online.

3. Create a supportive learning environment

Building trust in an online learning environment starts with regular touch points that demonstrate consistency and reliability. Whether you work with students one on one or in small groups, facilitate opportunities for collaboration during a session as well as outside of a live, online class. Outline clear expectations, office hours, touch points, and regular forms of communication. We like applications like [Remind](#), [ClassDojo](#) or [Edmodo](#) for ongoing collaboration between teacher-student and student-student. Ongoing collaboration is a critical component when implementing an engaging and supportive online learning environment for the first time.

4. Use a mix of learning tools that are readily available for better engagement

As an educator delivering lessons online, it's critical that you prepare well beforehand. Use a mix of learning tools and a variety of content to keep momentum moving forward. Use screen sharing to incorporate videos, online games, websites, pdf worksheets, and power points. There are many free resources on the web, and here a few that we recommend:

1. TEDEd offers free lessons and content to educators: [click here](#).
2. Scholastic is offering free access during school closures: [click here](#).
3. News2You is offering free access to special education content: [click here](#).

5. Foster personal relationships with each student and have fun

As a teacher working online, you have a unique opportunity to loop parents or guardians into each student's at home learning process. Use this advantage to get to know your students personally and incorporate what you learn into your personalized lesson plans.

6. Use breakouts for individual and group projects

Whether you're using Zoom or another HIPAA compliant virtual classroom solution, you will have options for screen-sharing and [breakout rooms](#). Use the breakout rooms in Zoom to separate students into smaller groups, and give them a specific question to answer or a small research project to conduct. As the Host, you'll have the ability to jump from breakout room to breakout room and force them back into the main room when you're done. Bring them back into the main video conference room and have each individual or group report on their findings.

7. Break learning into smaller chunks to establish a pattern of activity and due dates

When learning online, you have some flexibility to break subjects into smaller chunks and meet more often throughout the day and week. Take advantage of this and enable your students to get ready, learn, apply, reflect and repeat. Also, try working with students one-on-one or in small groups of 3-4 students at a time.

8. Provide prompt feedback

Online learning is digital by nature, and most HIPAA compliant video conferencing softwares have engagement tools. One of these tools in Zoom is [polling questions](#). Use polling questions, chat, video, audio, and other means to track student engagement and progress. Allow students to self-grade and self-assess with you one-on-one. Provide prompt feedback to redirect student attention and reinforce positive behavior.

Communication planning outside of the classroom

Get Organized

Create a schedule and stick to it. Plan morning and afternoon routines. Don't forget to plan emails, phone calls, outreach, live sessions with students, follow up, meetups with colleagues, breaks, walks, and lunch. Your self-care is critical, and the first step to minimizing stress in your day is to create a structure and stick with it.

This might seem obvious, but if you're teaching online for the first time you do need to consider your routines in a very different way. You won't have physical contact, and communication needs to be much more intentional. In addition to planning your own routine, help students plan their own routine. Students (especially the fragile and high need students we serve) learn better when they have dependable and predictable schedules.

Ms. Smith, 1st Grade Special Education Teacher, Sample Daily Routine

AM Routine	Lunch/Midday	PM Routine
Exercise + Mindfulness Shower Eat + Coffee Hydrate	Lunch bunch, get up and walk around	Parent notes in message board 
Real world moment - wrangle my own kids and get them going	Real world moment - keep my own kiddos entertained and focused on their own learning ;)	Real world moment - snack time for my own kids (maybe even lock them in a room - j/k don't really do that)
Review of schedule, announcements, and learning objectives 	Check and connect	Homework/study skills planner checks
Message parents with session schedules, zoom video office hours, and reminders 	Post to my classroom communication app something cool from my virtual classroom 	Message colleagues, collaborate on zoom video call 
Make personal connections	Review AM formative assessment/log-in/metrics data	Review PM formative assessment/log-in/metrics data

Communication

Use email, phone, and safe school-based communication apps. We like [Remind](#), [ClassDojo](#) or [Edmodo](#). Don't hesitate to create a community where parents can collaborate, but make sure that you moderate the discussion to keep it positive and constructive.

Email/Share Activities with Families

Prepare digital folders of pdf worksheets, videos, games, website, and other activities that you can email to families. Keep the activities focused on IEP goals and objectives, and make sure you outline a clear purpose for each activity. When you follow up to verify completion and assess progress, use Zoom to screen share or the webcam to share.

Newsletter

Create a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter for your families so they can stay connected and informed. Newsletters should highlight key announcements, successes, expectations and upcoming events. Visually appealing, fun and simple newsletters are always best.

Phone Calls

Make sure that you have at least weekly phone calls (or daily if caseload size permits) with your families and students. They need to hear from you. Hearing from you also engages families and reminds them to be accountable to learning.

Recorded Videos

Exchanging recorded videos is an effective way to stay in touch and engage with students. Try sending a recorded video of yourself daily or regularly with greetings, updates, and upcoming events. Allow your students and families to send recorded videos back to you. This is made easy with safe school-based communication apps.

Video Chat with Administrators and Staff

Schedule regular or ad hoc video meetups with administrators and staff. Stay in touch with your colleagues and keep the conversation going. Use these meetings with administrators to address questions, policy, and share successes. Meet up with staff to share teaching strategies, coordinate efforts with a specific student, and make up for all the coffee talks you're missing out on by working remote.

Video Office Hours

Schedule office hours where families, students, and colleagues can jump into your Zoom virtual classroom. Schedule your office hours on different days and at different times so families can find a time that works best for them. Use these office hours to answer questions, solve problems, troubleshoot, and coordinate.

Paperwork

You can't escape three things: death, taxes, and paperwork. Paperwork is critical for documenting a student's education. Take time to properly document your communication with families and students, update your case logs, update your IEP software system, prepare progress reports. You may find that you have quiet time like never before, so take advantage of this and be thorough and detailed.

Research and Plan

Have you had a project you've wanted to do for months or years? Is there something you want to brush up on or improve? Plan this into your days, be intentional, and do some professional development. Without a commute, those water cooler talks, coffee talks, and other hallway conversations, you will likely find yourself with an additional chunk of time on your hands.