

Digital Learning for Patients with Chronic Pain

*This handout is intended for clinician use (not for patient distribution) to help with brainstorming ideas about digital learning to support their patients during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was created by the SPP Pain SIG Clinical Committee. We hope that this is a helpful resource for our colleagues to both affirm and expand your creative toolbox for supporting patients with chronic pain during this pandemic.

- **Daily schedule**

- Write a Daily Schedule:
 - Sleep time
 - School time
 - Scheduled breaks
 - Water, snacks, meals
 - Stretch
 - Exercise
 - Set consistent wake up time & bedtime
 - Do at least a short exercise: stretch, core exercises, lift, yoga, running
 - Short exercise *in the morning* may help with pain management, improving focus, and increasing motivation
- Make weekly calendar
 - Schedule time for online classes, homework, exercise, family time, and extracurricular activities
 - Add additional activities to days that are “slow”
 - Schedule 2-4 activities for each chunk of the day: morning, afternoon, evening
 - Add activities you enjoy:
 - Baking/cooking, reading, playing music, paint/draw/color, origami learning a new skill, games, crosswords/sudoku/word searches
 - Social activities (socially distanced & virtual)
 - Don’t forget to include reading & time to be outside
 - Be sure to add movement/stretch breaks throughout the day
- ****Pacing**** -
 - be sure seated/focused time is not too short/too long
 - Schedule breaks

- **Prep in Advance:**

- Take advantage of webinars or practice sessions from the school
 - Gather information, learn what you can
 - Remember, avoiding preparation makes transitions harder
- Adapt summer schedule to start approximating the fall schedule (sleep time, activity time)

- Discuss setting weekly Zoom calls with friends/peers (especially for kids who have been isolated or are socially anxious)
- **Contact school to get needed computers or internet access/hot spots
- **Physical Work Space:**
 - Limit Distractions
 - Private as possible
 - Not your bed
 - Discuss with school any access needs (computers, internet access/hot spot)
 - Assess ergonomics (comfortable chair with enough support, monitor at a good height and distance, place for water bottle nearby to stay hydrated)
- **Create Plan for IEP/504 at Home:**
 - Consult with your school for strategies to implement your 504 Plan
 - Encourage patients (and parents) to advocate for themselves
 - Implement Pain Coping strategies
 - (continue hydration, snacks, stretching, taking breaks)
 - Consult with school about any learning disability related needs
- **School Time**
 - Set consistent location for class time and school work
 - Limit distractions (screens, other people) in school area
 - See above for physical work space
 - Avoid any school work in bed
 - Schedule brief breaks (get water, get a snack, stretching, brief core exercises)
 - Reward yourself with fun activities once work is done
 - Check-in times
 - Set weekly time to review to make sure you are not missing work
 - Review your schedule & modify as needed
 - Find accountability partners/friends to keep each other on track
 - Check in with friends like you would during breaks at school
 - Support and encourage each other to keep up with work
- **Sleep**
 - Keep consistent sleep/wake time
 - Limit variability to not more than 2 hours
 - Create a relaxing bedtime routine
 - Find activities that are not activating your mind or body
 - Trial relaxation apps
 - Avoid screens 1 hour prior to bed
 - Limit time in bed awake & avoid awake activities in bed
 - Get out of bed if not falling asleep:
 - Relaxing, non-activating activities: relaxation strategies, look at magazine, coffee table book, cross word puzzles, re-read an old book, origami, sketch/color
 - Use a book light or low-light

- Avoid daytime naps
- Be sure to get exercise during the day
- **Option of Digital Learning vs. In-Person**
 - Make decisions based on educational goals and values that your family holds
 - Encourage families to educate themselves about COVID-19 precautions, education options & balance with the family needs (health needs, childcare needs, etc.)
 - Consult with physicians with any medical concerns (or health concerns)
 - Discuss impact on immune system (whether or not the patient is compromised)
 - Discuss recommendations/precautions if the family includes/interacts with older adults or immuno-compromised family members
 - Chronic pain or social anxiety alone are not reasons to AVOID school
 - Digital learning is not a convenient excuse to avoid school
 - Digital learning may be the best option if it is consistent with the family values for health and education
 - Take health precautions seriously.
 - If patients DO return to school, encourage them to follow health guidelines and the school safety protocols closely.
 - Encourage patients to encourage their peers to follow guidelines as well.
 - Consider creating your own template: (feel free to modify from Sara Williams & the Cincinnati team statement below)
 - “From a health standpoint, we are recommending that kids and families follow the plan that works the best for them from an educational and developmental standpoint, and not make decisions about what kind of school program to attend based on the pain alone. If kids do attend an in person program, we recommend that kids take the precautions that schools put into place seriously, because while kids with chronic pain conditions are not immunocompromised, they certainly can pick up illnesses just due to being run down or not having a lot of exposure to people due to isolation. We do not recommend that the pain alone decides what educational path kids should follow.”
- **Sources for reference:**
 - CDC Guidelines:
 - General CDC info: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - School related: from 6/30: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-testing.html>
 - American Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines:
 - Return to school: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>
 - National Association of School Psychologists – COVID Resources: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>

- World Health Organization:
 - General: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=CjwKCAjwgdX4BRB_EiwAg8O8HVMlKYxWtkpc1qJvc2zwnIV_EJlAleJkjJdumzmWkjbQWPrwvxbayXoCm7QQAvD_BwE
 - School Recs (3/2020): https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=ba81d52_4&gclid=CjwKCAjwgdX4BRB_EiwAg8O8Ha0nju5gRaT8EKuiaKSMr5XEFTmTvzlxHbyijMLrDjZE6vwdc0t7cBoC5clQAvD_BwE
- American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/>
- Check with local public health department recommendations
- **Ask your hospital/department/media department for guidelines and talking points