

Wellness Wednesday



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How To Help Shy And Introverted Kids With Remote Learning

Experts share their advice for parents navigating online classes with kids who are nervous on-screen.

At this point in 2020, parents, students and teachers can confidently say that remote learning is challenging, to put it mildly. One big issue is the experience doing class via video conference and the anxiety it can provoke among kids.



“Students might be worried about how they appear on camera or what their background looks like and what their peers are thinking,” Jessica Foster, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician at Akron Children’s Hospital, told HuffPost. “Answering a question in a Google classroom can induce performance anxiety. It can be harder to feel a connection to the teacher and to the other students in the room. Our nonverbal communication, such as supportive nods and smiles of encouragement from other kids and the teacher, can be lost or hard to see in video conferencing.”

“Encouraging comments from peers that might occur in an in-person classroom setting can also be missing in a video format,” she added. “If the student has difficulty with consistent internet access or struggles using the video conferencing platform, this can also lead to stress and worry that may impact a child’s participation online.”

For a child who is shy, these additional challenges can make classroom participation feel impossible. Even students who aren’t shy in person may feel much more reserved and less inclined to participate on-screen, potentially hampering their learning experience.

So what can parents do to help a child who is struggling with shyness in the age of remote learning? Read on for advice from Foster and other experts.

Ask them about it.

“One of the first steps to helping students who are shy on camera is to learn why they are shy,” said Isaiah Pickens, a clinical psychologist and the CEO of iOpening Enterprises. “Students could be shy because they are naturally introverted, or be driven by fear or anxiety that is focused on how the house looks, feeling like they will be made fun of, worry about the coronavirus or a number of other reasons. To provide the age-appropriate support, it begins by discovering why children are shy about getting on camera.”

Rather than make a big deal of it, parents and caregivers can tee up this conversation in a calm, comfortable way by bringing it up while driving, cooking dinner or drawing together. Show curiosity, focus on listening and try not to make their child feel judged.

"You can say, 'I notice that you can be shy or quiet in front of screen/video learning. Is that true? Can you tell me why?'" suggested Nuanprang Snitbhan, a clinical psychologist who works with families and creator of Kindness Cards for Kids: 52 Ways to Make Every Day a Little Better.

"Ask your child what about the experience feels most 'scary' or uncomfortable to him/her," advised psychologist Sanam Hafeez. "Don't 'accept' nondescript answers such as, 'I just don't like it.' Get to the root of what they dislike."

Validate their feelings.



Once your child expresses their concerns, let them know it's OK to feel nervous, anxious, insecure, disheartened or whatever emotion they're experiencing.

"It is quite natural to feel self-conscious about being on camera, and it is important to validate your child's feelings about this," said licensed clinical psychologist Cindy Graham.

You should also show support and make it clear that you will do your best to help them through this situation.

"Parents should be understanding of why their child is having a hard time being on the camera," said Sarah Brown Wessling, 2010 National Teacher of the Year and Johnston High School English teacher who has been working with the video communications company Prezi to help teachers and students adjust to distance learning. "Let them know that it's a totally new situation for everyone and that it's OK to mess up. Learning comes from mistakes!"

Remind them they're not alone.

"Remind your child that she's not the only one who feels this way," advised Foster. "Everyone is going through this new learning curve together — parents, kids and teachers."

In addition to making your child feel less alone in feeling anxious or nervous, parents can also assure them that their classmates probably aren't watching and scrutinizing them as much as they fear.

Graham suggested using the Selective Attention Test, an exercise that reminds us what our brains do and don't observe in a given moment.

"It is a great way to show kids that people do not notice nearly as much about what is going on around them as we worry they do," she said. "Reassure your child that while they may be more aware of their own actions, the students also in the remote learning classroom are not noticing so much."

Create a comfortable learning environment.

Parents can ensure the space where their child does remote learning is pleasant and comfortable.

“Introduce the idea of creating a safe and relaxing learning space by asking them to help you brainstorm what to bring to this area — for example, fidget toys, an encouragement rock, a relaxing image of one’s favorite place, a weighted lap blanket, low-sugar mint candies, a lavender pillow, etc,” said Snitbhan.

Parents can also offer to be in the same room off-screen for a couple of classes, at least at the beginning to help them feel support as they get comfortable. The presence of a favorite toy or mellow pet off-screen may also help.

Foster noted that kids may be self-conscious about their background or sensitive to what’s happening behind them, so parents can help them choose a classroom-appropriate spot — whether at their house or in a public space or facility with internet for those who don’t have access at home.

“Knowing ahead of time what you look like on screen including what will show in your background gives you a chance to get comfortable and make adjustments,” she explained. “Kids should also work with their family to find a space that is quiet with as few distractions as possible — this may be quite challenging if there are multiple remote learners at home and can also be a challenge in small spaces, so this may require some planning and creativity to get kids through each school day!”

She also noted that being prepared for class always makes a child feel more confident.

“Make sure all of your children’s supplies and books are right there where they need them before the start of class, and muting distracting background noises will help your child stay on task and be more engaged,” she advised.

Talk to the teacher.

“Your student may be able to talk directly and frankly offline with their teacher about what they are experiencing, what is making online learning hard for them and they can problem solve together,” Foster noted. “Depending on their age or the specific situation, the parent may also need to get involved to help talk with the teacher and make a plan.”

Communicating directly and regularly with your child’s teachers fosters helpful collaboration as you can brainstorm different approaches to try. You may explore new options for helping your student engage in the classroom and set goals together. Your child could request to log on early or stay on after class ends to form a more direct connection.

“As educators and caregivers, we need to teach our kids to advocate for their needs with remote learning, whether they are shy or not,” said Megan Allen, 2010 Florida Teacher of the Year and founder of Tailored Learning Supports for Families. “It’s all so different from a four-walled classroom. We need to teach them to speak up with a question, raise their hand if they can’t hear, and on the other side, share the airtime in a collaborative learning space. If they are too shy to do so in front of the whole class, I’d suggest working out a secret sign with the teacher. That way they can advocate for their needs in a way that they feel comfortable.”

Turn off the camera when possible.

A useful question to ask teachers is if it's possible for students to turn off their cameras during class so that they don't get distracted staring at their own appearances.

One option is to turn the camera off after roll call and just use a profile picture or name as an avatar. Another is to ask for breaks from a camera requirement throughout the day. There's also the option to simply adjust the camera view.

"I have recommended to several families with children who just don't want to have the camera on during class, but need to follow school protocol, to position the camera where it doesn't show their full face," said Meredith Essalat, a school principal and author of "The Overly Honest Teacher."

"Adjusting the screen placement to show that they are working and engaged without having their face on display is a great compromise in having students partake in the accountability of being online and participating with their classmates in whatever subject they are studying, while feeling a bit more sense of privacy and security in shrouding their face," she added.

Graham offered another solution: "Cover the image of themselves. This can be done with a sticky note or by changing the tile options to only have the speaker on-screen."

Practice, practice, practice.

"As much as we usually encourage our children to stay off devices, if you have a child who is camera shy on remote learning, perhaps have them spend some time Facetimeing with a friend just to get used to the concept of 'video talking' during a more relaxed time," Hafeez suggested.

Testing out FaceTime, Zoom or other video conferencing platforms with friends and family can help kids acclimate to being on-camera, hitting different buttons like "mute," and entering breakout rooms. This practice will boost their confidence by showing them they can successfully use these tools — and even have fun while doing it. If they're still struggling with shyness, start with short conversations and build from there.



"Using roleplay to help your child learn how to navigate and become familiar with the videoconferencing functions can also reduce their stress and anxiety," Foster said. "Practice makes perfect, and soon it will become second nature to participate in class on camera. The more you raise your hand and give it a try, the more comfortable you will feel participating. If your child knows they are sharing something in class beforehand, practicing can help ease anxiety."

"If you have to employ a few extended family members to do a 'mock classroom' with someone functioning as the teacher and others as the students, this would be ideal," added Hafeez.

Be patient and give it time.

"It's important not to make this bigger than it is and be confident in your child's ability to adapt with support," said psychotherapist Noel McDermott. "Unless your child has specific conditions that affect their ability to adapt naturally then they will adapt, it is how children in particular are designed."

He emphasized the importance of trusting educators in their expertise and follow their lead in navigating this new situation. It's still relatively early in the school year, so there's time to work through the growing pains and forge connections between educators and students.

Meghan Fitzgerald, an educator who founded the outdoor early learning program Tinkergarten, said she tries not to use the term "shy" because it can have negative connotations and sound more fixed than it is. Instead, she sees them as "choosing to take an 'onlooker' stance" in new situations.



"First and foremost, be patient and give kids that time to observe, assess and adjust to the new online classroom environment," said Fitzgerald. "And, do not assume that kids are getting a lesser experience if they choose to look on for a while. If you are concerned, chat casually with kids after the session ends and ask what they did, saw, heard and learned. You'll likely be surprised at how much they got out of it. Try not to ask questions that indicate to kids that you thought they didn't enjoy it — they'll likely pick up on your slant and start to worry too."

As multiple experts noted, it's helpful to keep a few things in mind while dealing with this confusing school year: We're all just trying our best, we're all in this together, and we're getting stronger.

"Remote learning will certainly never replace the vibrance that comes from in-person, on-campus education, but if we can use it as a catalyst for academic and personal growth during this time of pandemic, our students will be better, long-term, because of its implementation," said Essalat. "We just have to be willing to exercise both creativity and compassion when strategizing ways with our more reticent students to make remote learning an effective and amenable tool in their academic success."



MUSHROOM STROGANOFF



268 Calories | *PREP TIME: 10 mins* | *COOK TIME: 15 mins* | *TOTAL TIME: 25mins*
YIELD: 4 Servings | *COURSE: Dinner* | *CUISINE: American*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 2 tbsp unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 cups fat-free, less-sodium vegetable broth (or beef if you're a carnivore)
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp tomato paste
- 5 oz sliced white mushrooms
- 8 oz sliced Cremini or baby Bella mushrooms
- 3.5 oz Shiitake mushrooms
- 1/4 tsp thyme
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp white wine or sherry
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat sour cream
- 8 oz uncooked noodles, No-Yolk noodles
- 1 tbsp minced fresh parsley for garnish

This healthy mushroom stroganoff made with shiitake, baby portabella, and cremini mushrooms and noodles in a light creamy sauce is a quick and easy meal, perfect for Meatless Mondays!

TIPS:

If you can't find a particular mushroom or would like to save money, use all white button mushrooms. You can also serve over spaghetti squash to save on carbs and calories.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 1/2 cups, Calories: 268 kcal, Carbohydrates: 52.5 g, Protein: 12.5 g, Fat: 3.5 g, Saturated Fat: 2 g, Cholesterol: 8.5 mg, Sodium: 312 mg, Fiber: 7 g, Sugar: 4.5 g
Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS



How to make:

- 1.) Cook noodles in a pot of salted water according to package directions, I like to under-cook them a bit so I can mix it with the sauce and let it finish cooking.
- 2.) Meanwhile, while the water starts to boil for the noodles, heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat.
- 3.) Melt butter over medium heat and add onions to the pan. Cook 2 - 3 minutes over medium-low heat. Add flour; stir with a wooden spoon for 30 seconds.
- 4.) Gradually add broth, Worcestershire sauce, and tomato paste, stirring constantly.
- 5.) Add mushrooms, thyme, salt and pepper; stir and cook 4-5 minutes or until thickened and bubbly, stirring constantly.
- 6.) Add wine; bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 4 minutes. Remove from heat; let stand 30 seconds.
- 7.) Stir in sour cream; add noodles, mix well and garnish with parsley if desired.

FEATURED EXERCISE

The Top 15 Moves to Tone Your Glutes

The one legged bridge

The one-legged bridge is a great way to isolate your glutes.

HOW TO DO IT: Lie on your back with one foot firmly planted on the floor with your knee bent. The free leg should point straight out at a 45-degree angle to the floor with

your free leg's thigh staying in line with the planted leg's thigh. Squeeze the glutes and thrust up to the sky, hold and slowly lower back down.

<https://www.livestrong.com/slideshow/1011205-top-15-moves-tone-glutes/?slide=10>



Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



Celebrate
every
win,
no matter
how small.



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