

# Distance Learning Experiences in Preschool

Oliva Diaz Melgarejo, B.S. – *Lead Teacher*

## Practices and strategies for educators: Relationships are essential in engaging children through online platforms.

The COVID-19 situation generated the need to implement distance learning as the main mode of instruction; for early childhood educators, the situation is unprecedented. The existing technologies or resources are not always developmentally appropriate for young learners; they rely on students being able to sit, read and complete work prompts employing long periods of focused attention. Young children enjoy hands-on experiences, one-to-one interactions, conversations and opportunities to guide their own classroom experience. Effective resources for young learners require differentiating instruction and meaningful connections to the child's classroom community.

Relationships are essential components of early childhood classrooms. Based on high-quality child-teacher interactions and positive classroom environments, relationships foster optimal growth in all developmental areas. With this knowledge early childhood teachers are shifting their work to online platforms and virtual resources hoping to support their children's development.

Given the climate during the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting relationships can be a challenging task. Nevertheless, skills that were being developed in preschool classrooms can be reinforced in other settings. Teachers can help in connecting aspects of the school world to their children's lives at home.



Pre-recorded read aloud activities can be interactive and help reinforce literacy skills.

## Strategies to address learning standards

### Social and Emotional Development:

- Maintaining children's connection to their classroom  
Example: Classroom and individual virtual check ins
- Encouraging communication with others  
Example: Facilitate virtual playdates
- Keeping the classroom routine by sharing a group activity  
Examples: Virtual Circle time, read aloud activity
- Encouraging autonomy for school and home common chores.  
Teachers can provide a list of expectations from school that can be transferred and practiced at home  
Examples: cleaning up toys, setting up the table, serving food and helping clean afterwards

### Approaches Toward Learning:

- Encouraging the exploration of topics related to nature  
Example: Children's pets or the visible seasonal changes in the environment

### Cognitive Development and General Knowledge:

- Exploration of mathematical concepts through daily activities  
Examples: Classifying silverware by size, color or type; pairing socks and finding patterns on the fabrics; setting up a shape hunt around the house.

### Language and Literacy:

- Working on vocabulary, narrative, phonological awareness and print knowledge  
Examples: guided book readings, recounting experiences through discussion and consequence discussion

### Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

- Exploring movement by engaging in physical activities  
Examples: pre-recorded yoga practice movement games, backyard explorations and discussing protective health measures

## Self-Regulation at school & at home

Research shows that young children rely on child-teacher interactions to help develop self-regulation skills. Early childhood teachers usually have an active role in scaffolding student's self-regulation skills, allowing for increasing independence over time. (Silkenbeumer, Schiller, Holodyski, & Kärtner, 2016).

One coping skill for teachers to share with families is how to take deep breaths with children. This strategy aims to reduce anxiety, lower activity level and help to become aware of surroundings. They can be part of any other activity and modeled using fingers to count breaths and noticing one element of the surrounding environment (saying I hear some sounds, see colors, feel objects, etc.)

The Circle time routine helps to connect with peers and teachers through a consistent predictable activity. They can benefit from literacy and counting games and receive information that have applications for daily life purposes like greeting people, telling the date or the weather forecast. This part of the routine usually signals the beginning of the school day and is a ritual of coming together as a community to share ideas, plans and feelings. Having access to this consistent piece of their school day routine can help children remember that they are part of their classroom community.

## Approaching transitions in fun educational ways

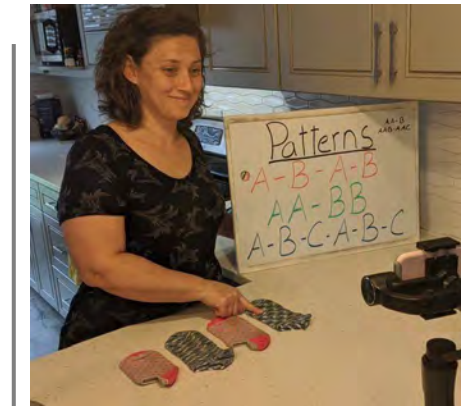
Songs that are used to aid transitions or to signal parts of the school day can be a useful content to share with children and their families. The songs can aid transitions at home such as clean up time or introduce fun literacy games for children to share with family members.



Yoga practice to support physical development

## Mathematical explorations

Teachers can model and encourage the exploration of everyday objects through activities that emphasize the language aspect of math, providing examples of open-ended questions in different situations.



### Utilize materials from the environment to create accessible math activities

Examples: Where do you see this shape in our kitchen? (Attributes); Tell me how you figured out that we need more cups? (Operations); What happens if I break this structure apart? If I put it together? (Transformation); How is this piece similar/different to the other pieces (Legos, blocks, toys)? (Classification); Do the colors in your shirt repeat? Do you see a pattern? (Pattern recognition) (Cross, C. T., Woods, T. A., & Schweingruber, H. E., 2009)

## Conclusion

Continuing children's learning while at home is an essential task, however the task itself does not imply structured learning. Talking, playing and reading with children are the cornerstones of early learning processes and the inspiration for these suggestions. Teachers have the potential to rise to the challenge of reaching children and their families by offering ideas, strategies, and resources that otherwise may not be accessible or known to parents.

## References

- Silkenbeumer, Judith & Schiller, Eva-Maria & Holodyski, Manfred & Kärtner, Joscha. (2016). *The Role of Co-Regulation for the development of social-emotional competence*. 10.11588/josar.2016.2.34351.
- Cross, C. T., Woods, T. A., & Schweingruber, H. E. (2009). *Mathematics learning in early childhood: Paths toward excellence and equity*. National Academies Press

*"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning."* Mr. Rogers