

# Maximizing Online Learning for Distractible Students

Kathy Kuhl

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## 1. Adapt the Environment to lessen distractions

- a. Sound: Use headphones, earbuds, or, if offline, earplugs.
- b. Visual: Is the view from student's seat distracting? Is lighting good? Don't watch online school in dark, cave-like places. Follow the 20-20-20 rule to relieve eyestrain. Tablet or computer's camera at a good angle for the student's vision and posture.
- c. Seating: Chair be low enough that students can keep their feet flat on the floor—no dangling nor cramped legs. Table should be of a height to support student's elbow comfortably as they write. Students may find it easier to focus if they sit on exercise balls, inflated cushions (HeadsUpNow.com), or T-stool (below). Or lie on their stomachs. For directions how to build a T-stool, see Carol Kranowitz's *The Out-of-Sync Child*, or buy one from [Therapy Shoppe](#) or Amazon.
- d. If teacher permits, student may pace or turn off screen and wander while watching. Teacher can require student to text in often to show they are still paying attention.\*
- e. Location: Consider foot traffic, WiFi signal, power outlet. Your child may do better studying different subjects in different parts of your home. Offer classroom teacher concise info on managing ADHD in class, recall their workload, and ask for a few specific accommodations:  
<https://chadd.org/for-educators/overview/> or  
[http://russellbarkley.org/factsheets/ADHD\\_School\\_Accommodations.pdf](http://russellbarkley.org/factsheets/ADHD_School_Accommodations.pdf)

## 2. Sensory practices that improve ability to focus

- Choose comfortable, but appropriate clothing.
- [My rules for effective fidgets at LearnDifferently.com](#)
- Movement suggestions from charter-school teachers\*:
  - All-black Rubik's Cube has been a favorite fidget at one school.
  - Make sure students keep fidgets off screen.
  - Teachers can have students listen for specific words in a lesson or story, & when they hear it either type something in the chat window or move their body a specific way.
- Oral: chewing gum, chewable jewelry, such as Chewelry or Chewigems, Chewsticks pencil toppers, and other chewable fidgets. [Links and more here.](#)
- Movement breaks before, during, and after lessons. See [GoNoodle.com](#) for videos to move to between lessons. \*\*

## 3. Tools for Parents to help with Organization and Focus

- With parental controls, limit student's access to apps they should use.

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- Post weekly school schedule on whiteboard or paper and make (or help older students make) checklists to prepare for the next day.
- Consistent bedtime <https://chadd.org/about-adhd/adhd-and-sleep-disorders/>
- Meet weekly and nightly to briefly review the next week or next day, respectively. Nightly checks should include seeing that homework and supplies are ready, and that the computer or tablet is on the charger. It's the virtual school equivalent of checking the backpack.
- Set priorities: relationships, love of learning, core skills, exercise, mental health, your family values.
- Train your children to deal with emotion wisely. [John Gottman, Ph.D., \*Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting.\*](#)
- Good advice on relationships: Paul Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens.*

## 4. Helping students organize themselves

- Two-part post on [time-blindness at my website.](#)
- Pomodoro technique. [the Time Timer.](#)
- <https://www.learndifferently.com/2013/02/22/the-time-timer/>
- Marydee Sklar's website, ExecutiveFunctioningSuccess.com and her book, [50 Tips to Help Students Succeed.](#)
- Carol Reynolds, Ph.D., [Why Freshmen Fail: And How to Avoid It](#)
- Henry Reiff, Ph. D., [Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities.](#)

## 5. Stress reducers

- Time outdoors: fresh air, nature, unstructured playtime. For why it matters, see Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods.*
- Provide administrative support with schedules, assignments, and communications. See [Rich Weinfeld, "Special Education & the Pandemic: Three Things to Know,"](#) about IEPs and DLPs (Distance Learning Plans).
- Enforce time off-screens during meals, before bed, in bedroom.
- Limit game time. Rapid-fire visual changes affect visual processing and vestibular systems. See [occupational therapists Amy and Evelyn Guttman's discussion of impact and remedies.](#) On [sleep disorders and ADHD, see CHADD.](#)

## Pages on LearnDifferently.com you may find helpful:

- [Teaching tips for kids with attention problems](#)
- [Choosing curriculum for your child](#)
- More about [free consultations with Kathy Kuhl.](#)