

As the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic develops further many young people will begin studying at home.

This is a massive change to their standard routine (and yours). Independent home study might present a challenge for a lot of young people as they adapt to new forms of learning. We've talked to the experts about the impact on young people working from home.

Here are five ways you can support young people learning independently at home.

1. Help them plan their time

Without structure, young people are likely to struggle with managing their time. This means that they may not complete set work, or overwork way beyond what they should. When working independently, young people can falsely assume all their time should be spent studying, but this can lead to stress and burn out. Young people should be encouraged to work hard, but they also need adequate sleep and leisure time to recharge and relax.

You can support them to manage their time while seizing the opportunity to build their time management and organisational skills.

- Creating a study timetable based on work set will give young people a sense of control and perspective.
- Making sure you schedule in social media/gaming and leisure time for activities.
- Using timers can help maintain focus – two hours of high-quality, focused study per day is worth a lot of more than six hours of unfocused study and procrastination.
- Schedule study for peak times when a young person is more alert and engaged – if they're not a morning person, it's unlikely they will benefit from an early morning study session.
- Scheduling reward times after blocks of study can provide an incentive to study. It also emphasises the benefit of short-term sacrifice for long term gain – this is a key lesson for young people in your care.

2. Support their mental wellbeing by listening to worries and stress

Sudden and unplanned change can affect young people in different ways. Some will rise to the challenge and others may be overcome by anxiety and fear. As schools close young people may feel worried. We need to be careful not to ignore the real feelings of young people once the novelty of being off school dissipates.

- Asking open questions about what young people are worried about gives them the chance to air any problems, worries or stresses they have. It gives you an opportunity to reassure them and offer support.
- Paying attention to feelings and worries about the pandemic is key to helping young people cope and to feel heard. Never underestimate the impact your love and support can have in helping them tolerate stress and uncertainty.

3. Monitoring negative habits

Online, you'll find lots of ways on how young people can study independently, but little attention is given to how not to study independently. Keep in mind that anxiety can sometimes cause avoidance, where a young person puts off something because it's worrying them.

There are several of negative habits that young people can fall into:

- Some young people will reach for energy drinks or coffee for that extra push and focus. This may help them stay alert but can have detrimental effects on sleep, mood, and appetite, not to mention caffeine's potent ability to provoke anxiety and disrupt our ability to process and learn information. Remember, caffeine is a habit-forming drug young people should stick to water or diluting juice.
- You might be well aware of a young person's tendency to work hard. Sometimes with added anxiety, this can be ramped up, where they focus all their energy on independent study at the expense of their leisure time, sleep or well needed down-time. This can be unhealthy, so support them to get the balance right.

- Holding ourselves to high standards can produce great results, but too much self- pressure in the form of negative self-talk can lead to demotivation and a loss of energy and concentration. Encouraging young people to think of positive statements that they can repeat can help e.g. 'I can do this, and everything will be OK, I believe in myself'.

4. Make sure they get enough sleep.

The importance of sleep for cognitive performance cannot be overstated. It's thought that when we sleep, our brains process information to create memories, a vital function when learning and retaining information.

- Studying late at night can impact our sleep patterns, especially if using screens. Remember, blue light from screens can disrupt our sleep and strain our eyes.
- The NHS recommends that young people get between 9-10 hours of sleep per night.

5. Make sure they get enough exercise

Exercise has many benefits for our physical and mental health. Being outside in the fresh air will also boost energy levels and help young people's ability to focus.

- Exercise releases endorphins (happy chemicals), which decrease stress and improve sleep.
- Encouraging young people to take a short walk or cycle a bike can help them de-stress and recharge.