

**WILLIAM ANNIN MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
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Dear parents and guardians,

If you are one of the few lucky parents whose children have risen to the occasion and embraced distance learning, this letter is not for you. **This is for those with normal preteens who feel lost without the structure of school, the companionship of friends, and who are floundering with the new reality of their education.**

Let's face it, **their predictable, structured lives have changed.** For the past 7-9 years (most will have more years to include preschool and daycare) your children have come to school, been taught for 9 periods a day by teachers with amazing, interactive lesson plans to hold their attention, surrounded by interesting and fun peers and smiling adults.

Now they exist at home, with you and their siblings (maybe). They are expected to get up, work at the table or bed or desk, figuring out how to locate what their teachers expect, completing assignments alone for a few hours a day. Then they have to entertain themselves for many more hours, stopping for meals and staying up late - because - well, they are not in school. Their siblings (older or younger) have their own issues. You are also at home (hopefully also working, though that does not make it easier) and most likely worried about your job, finances, looking after the kids, making meals, cleaning like crazy, etc.

And this is for the foreseeable future. And starting next week, teachers will be introducing new material and expecting a little more from students to insure learning. How to survive?

**Believe it or not, a good routine helps.** Have them get out of bed at a reasonable hour, get cleaned up, and get dressed in the morning. They should have a good breakfast, do something for exercise, and get their heads in the right place for work. **Daily morning routine is the key idea here.** Ask any adult who regularly works from home. Shuffling out of bed at 11 a.m. and eating breakfast while playing video games is not a good way for your child to get ready for school work.

Everyone working from home should have a **designated place and time for working.** We recommend doing school work in the morning, right after your daily morning routine. It helps to have materials nearby so time is not wasted "finding" what students need. It is smart to have a portable box of "school supplies". Most middle schoolers will need **parents to oversee them** locating and writing down teacher assignments for the day. If you're having trouble keeping track of all the classes, create a daily calendar with your student. These are [tips for logging in.](#) etc. in case you need reminders. Most middle schoolers will need parents to **get them started** and to help them pace their work. They just do. Take a look at these tips for setting up a good distance learning environment [here.](#)

Remember that the **brain of a 12-14 year old simply is not yet developed for “executive functioning”**. A child’s brain cannot easily organize, manage time, eliminate distractions, or plan ahead. They need structure and supportive supervision. They need a

- **weekly calendar** and a
- **daily list of assignments to do.**
- **hard copy, stuck in front of them at their work area**

See [this article](#) from the Child Mind Institute on **helping kids develop executive functioning skills**.

Teachers struggle to hold a middle schooler’s attention for 40 minutes, so don’t expect independent work for more than 30 minutes tops. They will need a **parent check in and short break every 30 minutes**. This definitely should not include social media or games - they are too hard to tear away from. They will need direction from you as to what their next chunk of work will be. And repeat in 30 minutes or maybe every 15 minutes as time goes on. **They have short attention spans!** See [this article](#) on how to increase your student’s attention span.

**When their school work is done, they will be “free”**. They do not have sports, music or dance lessons, tutoring, or any outside of school classes. **Chances are, they will not know how to organize free time either**. They are probably desperate for social contact, so let them use their phones or schedule virtual get togethers on zoom. Let’s face it, we are doing the same with our friends. Check out [this article](#) that details different options for connecting with others via video chat.

Let them find a way to be a helper. Let them get creative - writing, music, arts and crafts, cooking, gardening - are wonderfully enriching beyond traditional education. Let them get fresh air and some exercise. Check out some of the [websites and activities on the list provided by our nurses and athletic trainers](#).

**If they insist on video games, game with them**. There is no better way to connect with them and to understand the pull of these games unless you engage. You have an instant foot into their world. See [Common Sense Media](#) for tons of information on gaming.

We understand that everyone’s family will have their own needs/ ways to structure their days. And we know that children thrive in supportive structure and routine. Needless to say, children also need connection. Spend a little **“quality” time listening to them and enjoying them as if they are your favorite people in the world**. They are, and they need to feel it, especially at this time. Praise also goes a long way when we are stressed. Praise something they have said or done every day. Someone once told me that the **ratio of praise to correction for children should be 10:1**. Now that’s a goal for all parents, especially in these uncharted times.

We encourage you and your child to visit the [BTPS School Counseling Distance Learning Site](#) for daily study tips, wellness tips, coping skills, and activities that are posted. If you haven’t yet taken the **10 Day Family Wellness Challenge** already posted, please consider it!

Once again, should you have concerns about your child’s emotional or mental health, we recommend these resources:

- your primary care physician/ pediatrician
- mental health practitioners/ therapists accessible through your health insurance provider
- [NJ PerformCare services for children](#)
- [Richard Hall Community Mental Health](#) Children’s Outpatient Services, Bridgewater
- [Somerset County PESS](#) (Psychiatric Emergency Screening Service/ Mobile Outreach) via Bridgeway.
- [Crisis Intervention Atlantic Health](#), Morristown Medical Center

All of us at WAMS Counseling Department are here to support you.

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