

A Teacher's Guide to Online Learning

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR EVERY TEACHER

By Lindy Hockenbary

A Teacher's Guide to Online Learning: Practical Strategies for Every Teacher

Lindy Hockenbary

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Line editor: Lindsee Tauck

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“This comprehensive and engaging book provides everything a teacher would want for effective online teaching, including an exploration of tools, examples of instructional techniques, ideas for motivating students, and more. Plus it’s fun to read. Lindy is a teacher’s teacher and has written the best guide to online teaching and learning available.”

Pamela (Livingston) Gaudet, Author of *Like No Other School Year*

“Lindy takes all her experience helping learning practitioners leverage technology and packages it up in an easy-to-read and handy manual. This year as teachers have pivoted back and forth from in-person to online, they have all struggled to figure out how to utilize technology in a meaningful way. This book gives you the appropriate background and foundation to begin to make a difference in your student's online learning endeavors.”

Tom Lademann, LuminEd

Book Description

Are you a K–12 educator who is teaching students over the internet with no face-to-face interaction? Online learning presents new challenges. Author Lindy Hockenbary does not sugarcoat the fact that online learning is different than face-to-face learning. She tackles the most common questions of new online instructors, including:

- How do you **engage** learners in a virtual environment?
- How do you develop **relationships** with students whom you never see in person?
- What does **classroom management** even look like in an online class?
- How do you **assess** students when there is no way to know if they are looking up all the answers?
- How do you ensure clear **communication** since you cannot stand over a learner's shoulder and ensure a task is accomplished?
- How do you communicate with and support the **families** of online learners?
- How do you ensure **equity** when students are never in the same physical space?

This book addresses each of these questions head-on by presenting key takeaways to guide online learning design. Lindy brings her experience as a classroom teacher and instructional technologist to create a clear picture of online learning strategies. Other classroom teachers, school leaders, and instructional technologists have contributed to the book to provide a well-rounded perspective on the topic of online learning.

This book was designed with K–12 teachers in mind, but the majority of information can be applied to higher education/postsecondary learning environments as well.

Chapter 13: Supporting Grown-Ups

Elementary and secondary school learners have grown-ups that support them at home. I use the word grown-ups because it is inclusive of all home environments and all caregivers, whether that be a parent, guardian, grandparent, or nanny/babysitter. In online learning, the learning environment and the home environment are one and the same. Therefore, together with this shift in learning environment comes a shift in roles. The grown-ups in your learners' lives move from the role of "homework helper" to "co-teacher." This is often a huge change for many caregivers, who suddenly find themselves taking a very active role in a child's formal learning as opposed to the passive role they have most likely played in the past.

This change in role must not be brushed over or forgotten in the planning of an online course. As an online teacher, you have to be very strategic about supporting these new co-teachers. 💡 Setting elementary- and secondary-aged students up for online learning success includes also setting their grown-ups up for success. The more prepared and knowledgeable caregivers feel about online learning, the more successful their children will be in an online learning environment.

Caregiver success is dependent not only on the decisions you make in your classroom but also on the direction and leadership you receive from your educational institution. Caregiver support and success should be addressed as part of all online learning initiatives. 💡 If you are a teacher seeking an online teaching position, I urge you to ask about caregiver success plans. Does such a plan exist? If so, what does it entail? 📌 What has the educational institution done to ensure students are set up for success at home? Does the educational institution have a plan for caregiver communication, training/education, and support?

This chapter will start by sharing caregivers' perspectives of online learning. I am a firm believer that hearing the stories of these at-home "co-teachers" will help you become a better online teacher. Then, Nikki Vradenburg shares her experiences helping teachers and schools create digital communication plans to support parents, guardians, and other caregivers. Nikki is a colleague with many years of experience as an elementary teacher and professional development provider. Throughout the chapter, think about the following key takeaway:

Organization and consistency are critical to online learning.

Caregiver Perspective of Online Learning

To gather information from the caregivers of school-aged kids, I conducted an anonymous survey. The questions and responses are summarized below.

What Age Is Your Child or Children?

Ages of children ranged from 5–22.

Briefly Explain Your Experiences with Online/Remote Learning.

Most caregivers had their first experiences with their children learning online in early 2020. Some had students that were currently back to full face-to-face learning in late 2020, while others had students that were still learning completely online because the school building remained closed due to COVID-19. Some had chosen to opt into full online learning for the 2020 school year due to COVID-19. Some had kids in a blended or hybrid model where learning was half in person and half online.

What Went Well with Online/Remote Learning from Your Perspective?

Several responses focused on learning strategies or student growth:

- “The thing I loved about online learning was that teachers did exactly what I would have done. They used the time they had with students to answer questions and make sure kids were on task/had the skills they needed and then the kids were supposed to work on projects/self-directed learning. Our son wasn't on Zoom all day—just in the morning . . . the learning happened when he was off Zoom.”
- “The way my son's learning was handled was great. He was sent work he needed to complete and also had Zoom sessions with his teachers. They also emailed parents, so you knew what assignments were being worked on and when they were due.”

- “She is doing well academically. Greater focus and concentration. Growing proficiency with digital skills and tools. Teacher has great class management and sets positive classroom culture.”
- “Some teachers, not all, made it a point to include online learners frequently by asking them questions and involving them in the lesson.”

A few responses said some version of “nothing.”

How Did Your Kids Feel about Learning Online/Remote?

There was almost an exact split between “love it,” “hate it,” or “didn’t mind it but the student misses friends.”

For those that loved it:

- “My son was fine with it. He’s Generation Z and has grown up in a digital world.”
- “He loved it, because he was in charge of his schedule AND he could dive deeper into topics that most interested him. He thought that was great and came to the lunch/dinner table with all this new knowledge he learned while diving deeper into things.”

For those that hated it:

- “It was a struggle. She did not enjoy it for the most part.”
- “They don’t like it. They miss their friends and have a hard time focusing.”

For those that didn’t mind it but missed friends:

- “She prefers in-person and misses being at school but is motivated to keep her grades up and on top of her work.”
- “Misses friends but enjoying the experience. Loves her teachers and the comfort and safety that comes from doing school from home.”

How Did You Feel about Your Kids Learning Online/Remote?

The responses seemed to be divided into three camps. The first camp spoke about the need for at least one parent to be available and dedicated to assisting with schoolwork:

- “If I could be there full-time to monitor and supervise, it might not be too bad. However, both parents work full-time, so we could only do the schoolwork at night (no internet access at the childcare provider) or on the weekends. None of us were at our best for learning.”

- “I was busy trying to finish my own schooling and am now working full-time, so I struggle when they are remote. I also feel as if they do not absorb and retain as much without a teacher and classroom environment.”

The second camp expressed positive feelings:

- “Positive. She is doing quite well. Creates less anxiety for our family.”
- “I actually loved it and am hopeful this is the beginning of the changes that need to come to education.”

And the third camp expressed negative feelings:

- “I personally think he learns very little.”
- “Didn't like it . . . I could see my son becoming withdrawn, skinny, pale . . . not good! Also a hassle with him being marked tardy or absent when he was there.”

What Could the School or Teachers Have Done to Make the Experience Better?

Responses to this question centered around three points. The first was regarding communication and consistency:

- “Being consistent. Attendance policies have changed several times (district and state more than school). Sticking with due dates. Have had a few that have changed to either earlier or later without warnings.”
- “Communication was lacking—clear concise instructions that matched what was actually posted online, online learning modules were not easily navigable.”

Organization and consistency are critical to online learning.

The second point surrounded the need to build stronger connections and relationships with students:

- “I do think they should have tried to make stronger social/emotional connections. That's where I think my kids felt abandoned.”
- “I think 2020 showed that they weren't building those important relationships already.”

Maslow before you Bloom! You must focus on the social-emotional side of learning.

The third point mentioned having too many synchronous video calls:

- “Not require them to stare at a computer monitor from 7:30 a.m. to 2:10 p.m. with the exception of lunch.”
- “What WAS disappointing was that in the fall they did a Zoom call for every period every day. So, he was basically sitting on Zoom all day like he would at school. He definitely didn't like that as much, and he certainly didn't learn as much nor deep dive as much.”

Do not replicate face-to-face instruction in an online environment.

How Did Your Kids' School(s) Communicate with You as a Parent?

Responses to this question were all over the board, but there were lots of answers that indicated email. A few noted computerized call systems or SISs.

What Went Well with Communication?

A few responses indicated positive experiences with school communication:

- “Consistent communication making us feel informed and in the loop has been great. More communication than ever before. School less a mystery.”
- “It was clear and straightforward, and I knew when assignments were due so I could give my son a nudge and check he was on track.”
- “Weekly newsletter from admin has been nice.”

A few responses related to the promptness or availability of school personnel:

- “Prompt response to emails.”
- “The teachers being available by email, phone, Zoom, Facebook, etc.”

Could the School or Teachers Have Done Anything to Make Communication Better?

Responses mostly focused around having a plan for consistent communication:

- “The school could have done a better job of formulating a plan and disseminating that information.”
- “Yes. They should have communicated often and in a variety of ways.”

Is There Anything Else You Would Like to Share?

Many responses thanked and commended teachers for their hard work. Those in a hybrid model expressed that there didn’t seem to be much of an online component:

- “I feel like this hybrid model that our school is using is not much more than partial face-to-face. There doesn’t seem like much of an online component.”

Enhancing Communication While Learning at Home by Nikki Vradenburg

I never thought I would see the day when I would write a book chapter about supporting parents. When I first started teaching in 2001, communicating with parents terrified me! I had some tough first experiences in my first year of teaching that I carried with me for many years. It was not until I became a parent that I truly understood the importance of a strong connection between home and school. As a new mom, it took every ounce of strength I had to trust a stranger with the care of my infant daughter. In that moment, I realized just how vital it is to develop strong relationships between home and school. I returned to my classroom after maternity leave with a new perspective about parent communication and devoted time to developing strategies that provided the families of my students with an abundance of access to our classroom and to my support without infringing on my personal time. As time went on, I learned that partnering with parents was one of the most effective ways to reach my students.

In 2017, I left the traditional classroom to work with MontanaPBS to implement a grant project devoted to developing professional learning programs for teachers in rural schools by providing support using technology and digital media. I now serve as a digital learning specialist to rural schools and offer one-on-

one coaching, small and large group learning sessions, and classroom demonstrations. My work with three specific schools allowed me the opportunity to develop strong relationships with administrators and teachers over the course of three school years. Like so many others in my line of work, when the pandemic closed schools in the spring of 2020, I found my email inbox full of requests for help. One of the most common requests I got was from administrators asking for guidance about how teachers could support the parents and caregivers who were assisting students to learn at home. During the school closures, the rural schools I support quickly discovered the holes in their communication strategies and needed help filling those holes. Families with limited or no access to devices or technology were the hardest to engage. There were significant numbers of families who lived in remote areas where there was no internet available, while others had not updated contact information and were unreachable. Teachers found themselves making phone calls, driving to the homes of their students, or meeting families in public locations to deliver instruction. It seemed that every teacher had their own unique communication plan, and some were using multiple tools and strategies. This was overwhelming for families, especially those who had more than one child attending school. It was exhausting for everyone involved and far from sustainable.

When the school year ended, the principal of one school reached out to me for help improving their communication with parents and caregivers. In preparation for a face-to-face training experience with this school, I did some research to help me develop a workshop that would help teachers and administrators build a communication plan that could be implemented when school started back up in the fall. I met with several parents and teachers during and after the home learning experience to gather feedback about using technology and digital tools to support students. Below are the three main pieces of feedback I heard from everyone I visited with:

- 1. Streamlined communication**—School-home communication would have been easier if all teachers/grade levels/schools were using the same platforms and consistency to communicate.
- 2. Feedback**—Students who did not get regular feedback from their teachers struggled to stay motivated while students who did get feedback had an easier time staying engaged.
- 3. Consistency**—Families who had more than one child enrolled in school struggled to manage the variety of teaching styles, communication methods, and digital tools. Even those with just one child engaged in online learning felt frustrated when assignments appeared in an LMS sporadically and did not appear connected to learning goals.

Once these key themes were revealed, I began to think about how I could help teachers provide consistent communication and feedback. I designed a workshop that I facilitated in person and online during the summer of 2020. In this session, I guided teachers and administrators through five steps I developed based on my own past experience as an elementary classroom teacher and the feedback I gathered from my interviews with parents and teachers:

1. *Reflect* on the communication tools and strategies already in place.
2. *Explore* the types of information schools must share with families and the tools that can be used to do this.
3. *Make a plan* for how and when teachers and schools will communicate with families.
4. *Orient* parents and caregivers so they understand the plan and the tools they will need to use.
5. *Provide ongoing support* to families as they develop routines to support home learning.

In the following sections, I will guide you through the exercises and discussions I facilitated with teachers. I invite you to take notes as you read and ponder how to effectively use digital tools to partner with parents.

Reflect

Before we can design a strong communication plan, we need to consider what we are already doing and examine whether or not it is working. List the tools and methods you use for communication. Consider the digital and non-digital exchanges you have with families throughout the school year. Think about tools that have multiple functions and how they can be leveraged to make communication easier. Some tools, such as student blogs or portfolio tools, provide students with opportunities to share messages about their progress and the work they are doing. As you build your list, circle or highlight the tools you know you use the most. Consider the questions below as you reflect on your list:

- Which tools and strategies do you use the most?
- How much time do you spend communicating with parents and caregivers?
- How many different digital tools are used to communicate with parents and caregivers?
- What frustrates you about communicating with parents and caregivers?
- What are your strongest communication methods?
- How can students be empowered to help communicate with their caregivers?

- What tools can be adopted that would support student communication with teachers and their families?

Consider the following categories of information shared with families:

- One-on-one parent-teacher conversations
- Announcements
- Assignments
- Reminders
- Recognition
- Learning goals
- Student work samples
- Resources/links
- Grades

Think about how you prefer to share with families. I always recommend teachers choose digital tools that perform multiple functions so that several types of information can be shared using one tool. For example, [Seesaw](#) is a student portfolio tool that has a parent communication system built in. Families can see their children's work and have one-on-one texting conversations with the teacher using one application. The paid version of this tool gives schools an option to send schoolwide announcements through the application.

In the reflect stage, I also suggest teachers survey families about their communication preferences. A simple survey can be sent to families about the devices they use at home, the tools they have used in the past with their children, and their preferences. There are people who prefer text messages to phone calls and those who prefer not to read email but love engaging with social media. While it would be impossible to develop a communication plan that meets the preferences of every family, this information can help you meet most parents in their comfort zone. Customizing communication for families is essential for remote learning. Students and their caregivers are more successful if they have direct contact with teachers. Try to keep all surveys short, sweet, and to the point! While open-ended questions provide more details, many parents prefer to answer surveys with more checkboxes and multiple-choice options. The following is a list of questions you might ask on a survey to families:

- What name does your child prefer?
- When is the best time of day to reach you by phone?
- How do you prefer to communicate with the school? With teachers? (e.g., text, email, phone calls, other)
- How often would you like to visit with your child's teacher?

- What kinds of devices do you and your child use at home? (e.g., iPads, Android tablets, smartphones, laptops, etc.)
- What do you want me to know about your child and how they learn?
- What are your hopes and dreams for your child during this new school year?
- Are there specific tools or strategies that you think would work best for your child?
- Are you open to communicating via social media? If so, which platforms do you prefer?
- What questions do you have about our school or classroom?
- How can I best support you and your family during this new school year?

Explore

When I deliver this workshop to teachers, I notice that as they reflect on their communication strategies, they begin to think about what efficient and consistent communication might look like not only in their classroom but also in their school as a whole. The key to a sustainable communication plan is to consistently use a manageable number of digital tools and strategies.

[Figure 13.1](#) provides insight into all the types of tools that teachers use on a daily basis to stay in touch with families. Are there tools on this table that were on your list? Are there items you need to add to your list now that you have reviewed this table? Circle or highlight the tools in this table that you are currently using.

Figure 13.1: Digital Tools for Communication

These tools and platforms are used by teachers to communicate with families. Some tools, such as portfolios and blogs, put the communication in the hands of the students. These tools are marked with an asterisk.

Tool Category	Specific Tools
Phone/email	Google Groups
	Individual messages via email or phone
	Gmail templates
	Gmail filters
	Google Voice
	Other:
Video conferencing	Google Meet

	Zoom Teams Other:
Social media	Facebook Instagram Twitter Snapchat TikTok Other:
SMS or texting platforms	Remind Bloomz Class Tag ClassDojo Seesaw* Google Voice Other:
Newsletters	Smore Google Docs Google Drawing Microsoft Word Microsoft Sway Canva Adobe Spark Seesaw* Other:
Class websites* (students can create websites using these tools to blog and	Google Sites Weebly Wix

share work)	Adobe Spark Other:
Portfolios and blogs	Seesaw* ClassDojo Kidblog* EduBlogs* Blogger* Other:
Learning management systems (LMSs)	Google Classroom Canvas Seesaw* Teams Other:
Student information systems (SISs)	Infinite Campus PowerSchool SIS Skyward SIS Other:
Other	

As you begin to refine your plans for which tools to use, it is important to look at each tool or platform and consider the type of communication it facilitates. Schools have a variety of messages that need to be shared with households, everything from the yearly calendar to reminders about library books and student progress reports. It is important to match appropriate tools with the message being communicated. Remember, communications with families can be divided into the categories below:

- One-on-one parent-teacher conversations
- Announcements
- Assignments

- Reminders
- Recognition
- Learning goals
- Student work samples
- Resources/links
- Grades

[Figure 13.2](#) identifies the types of communication that correspond to each tool category. Examine the table and think about all the different information that you send home throughout the year. You may notice how some of the communication methods send the same information. This could provide an opportunity to streamline communication into just two or three methods. For example, many teachers have stopped creating newsletters in favor of keeping a classroom website updated with the same information they used to send home in newsletter format.

Figure 13.2: Purpose of Communication

Tool Category	Specific Tools	Purpose of Communication
Phone/email	Google Groups	Parent-teacher one-on-one
	Individual messages via email or phone	Announcements Recognition
	Gmail templates	Reminders
	Gmail filters	
	Google Voice	
	Other:	
Video conferencing	Google Meet	Parent-teacher one-on-one
	Zoom	Announcements
	Teams	Recognition
	Other:	Reminders
Social media	Facebook	Announcements
	Instagram	Recognition
	Twitter	Reminders
	Snapchat	Student work samples

	TikTok Other:	
SMS or texting platforms	Remind Bloomz Class Tag ClassDojo Seesaw Google Voice Other:	Parent-teacher one-on-one Announcements Reminders Resources
Newsletters	Smore Google Docs Google Drawing Microsoft Word Microsoft Sway Canva Adobe Spark Seesaw Other:	Announcements Recognition Reminders Learning goals Resources
Class websites	Google Sites Weebly Wix Adobe Spark Other:	Announcements Recognition Reminders Student work samples Learning goals Resources
Portfolios and blogs	Seesaw ClassDojo Kidblog EduBlogs	Announcements Recognition Reminders Student work samples

	Blogger	Learning goals
	Other:	Resources
Learning management systems (LMSs)	Google Classroom	Assignments
	Canvas	Grades
	Seesaw	Announcements
	Teams	Recognition
	Other:	Reminders
		Student work samples
		Learning goals
		Resources
Student information systems (SISs)	Infinite Campus	Assignments
	PowerSchool SIS	Grades
	Skyward SIS	Announcements
	Other:	Reminders
		Learning goals
Other		

Make a Plan

The general reaction that I hear from teachers at this point in our training is that a teacher could spend all day communicating with families. During the school closures in early 2020, that is what some teachers felt like they did! The beauty of digital communication tools is that if they are used strategically, teachers will spend less time sharing information with families and more time planning for and providing instruction to students.

Once you've collected preferences from families, combine that information with your own preferences to create a communication plan. I find when grade-level teams or even the entire school staff engage in this planning together, a uniform plan can be crafted that is easy for families and teachers to follow. Households with more than one child attending school will appreciate having the entire school use

the same set of tools and strategies.

I encourage you to complete this exercise with the other teachers at your school using [Figure 13.3](#). Have each grade-level team add what tools families will have to interact with if they have a student in that grade. When complete, examine the chart from the perspective of a parent who may have a child across different grade levels. How many tools are parents being asked to manage?

Figure 13.3: The Family Perspective

Grade	Tools Families Will Have to Interact With
K	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	

I use this [digital communication plan template](http://bit.ly/digitalcommsplan) (bit.ly/digitalcommsplan) with teachers in my workshops. You can make a copy of this template to create your own plan. Think about the tools you will use and how often you will use them. Many

teachers feel overwhelmed by email and try to find communication methods that keep them away from their email inbox. When I was teaching, I made it a habit to update my classroom website weekly on Thursdays. I emailed parents after each update so they would be sure to check the website. I also included the link to my website in the signature line of my emails so that parents would always be able to find it. I know teachers who send a weekly email to parents with information they will need for the week. Parents will come to expect these emails or website updates on certain days and at certain times.

Once created, this plan can be shared with administrators and families. Remember to try and choose the smallest number of tools possible so that communication can be efficient. While communicating is an important part of teaching, it does not have to take the majority of a teacher's time.

Digital Orientation

A plan only works if people use it! This is why I recommend that schools make time and space for sharing communication plans and providing training on how to use the digital tools. Caregivers will be more successful communicating with the school if they have the apps downloaded, the passwords saved, and a general knowledge of when to expect certain types of messages, as well as where to find information when they need it. Schools I visit have developed creative orientation events for their communities.

Back-to-School Night (In Person or Virtual)

Some schools hold a back-to-school night at the beginning of the school year in person or via video conferencing and make time for the digital tool orientation during that event. Some schools hold a "family boot camp" event where students and their families can engage in some hands-on training to use the digital tools they will need for school. These boot camps can be a series of events over a period of time and can take place in person or online.

Tutorial Videos

Other schools have recorded tutorials about how to use each tool. These tutorials are shared on the school website and social media. Families who need support are encouraged to explore the tutorial videos to troubleshoot if challenges arise.

Initial Contact

For many teachers, the first emails and phone calls they make to families detail their communication plan and how families can expect to hear from teachers during the school year. They also provide information about the tools and applications students will be using for home learning.

Provide Ongoing Support

As the school year moves along, it is important to stay in touch with families about the communication plan and find out how the digital tools are working for them. Asking for regular feedback and providing opportunities for more training, if needed, are the key to making sure everyone can follow the communication plan.

Dedicated Support Staff

Some schools I work with have identified staff members who can serve as the point of contact for parents who might need help troubleshooting the digital tools students are using. For many families, having a person they can call or email is a tremendous service. These staff members can be teachers, administrators, technology integration specialists, paraprofessionals, or school volunteers. Often, they are paid a stipend for the extra time they may spend supporting families.

Tech Support Website

Other districts I have visited have a designated tech support tab or section to their school website that houses tutorials, troubleshooting tips, and frequently asked questions. When families run into trouble, they can consult the website for help. Teachers are sure to provide the link to this website to families who reach out with problems. It can be more efficient to guide parents and caregivers to find the solutions to their troubles on their own. This is also a tool that can be shared during a family boot camp or back-to-school event for families.

Help Ticket System

Some schools have developed a system for families to ask for help when they need assistance outside of the school day. Families can access a digital form that serves as a "help ticket." These forms are received by IT personnel and administrators who can contact families directly to help solve any technical issues.

Digital Parent Corner

Many teachers I know designate a place on their website or within their learning management system as a “parent corner” where information for parents is shared that may be needed with helping students at home. If these parent corner messages are included in the assignments in [Google Classroom](#), they will also appear in the guardian summaries that are sent via email each week. It can be helpful to use a familiar icon or symbol to identify the parent corner information.

Pro Tips for Strong School-to-Home Communication

There is no perfect communication plan, and teachers often find they need to change their plans as the school year progresses based on the needs of their students and families. The best thing teachers can do for families is to consistently reach out with positive messages and support. A little encouragement goes a long way for students and their caregivers. It is important to remember that many adults are new to the world of digital communication and may need more support than their students do in the beginning.

These are my final pro tips for teachers as they begin to build stronger relationships with students and their families through the development of thoughtful communication plans:

- Strong parent-teacher relationships build the foundation for communication between home and school.
- Good communication plans take *time* to implement!
- Feel free to alter the plan if it doesn't work!
- Establish healthy boundaries about communication. It is okay to be unavailable at times!
- Consistency is important, but perfection is not required! Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

Course Communications versus Specific Student Communications

As I was reading Nikki's chapter, it helped me to divide caregiver support in online learning into two parts:

1. Communicating
2. Teaching

As an online teacher, you must support grown-ups by having clear and consistent communications regarding expectations, due dates, and so on.

Organization and consistency are critical to online learning.

However, you must also support grown-ups by teaching them in addition to your students. The grown-ups supporting our students might need assistance with the tasks below:

- How do you organize learning tasks and routines for successful at-home learning?
- How do you use and troubleshoot the digital tools required by online learning? (Remember that many of the tools you will use with students, such as screencasting videos, can be used to create parent resources too.)
- How do you best support online learners? How much is too much or too little student support?

Caregivers also need to understand what online learning is—and is not! You as an online teacher must educate the grown-ups in your students' lives about online learning. Most of these grown-ups have probably never experienced online learning. They must understand that online learning does not mean that the educational institution and/or teacher will keep their child busy all day. They must understand that a day of online learning is most likely going to be shorter than a typical face-to-face school day. Share this information with caregivers. Explain the research behind the challenges and fatigue observed with synchronous learning. They need to understand why you are doing what you are doing with online learning.

In terms of communicating with caregivers, it helps me to think of this in two parts:

1. Communications regarding course information such as announcements, assignments, resources, and so on
2. Communications regarding a specific student

Communications regarding Course Information

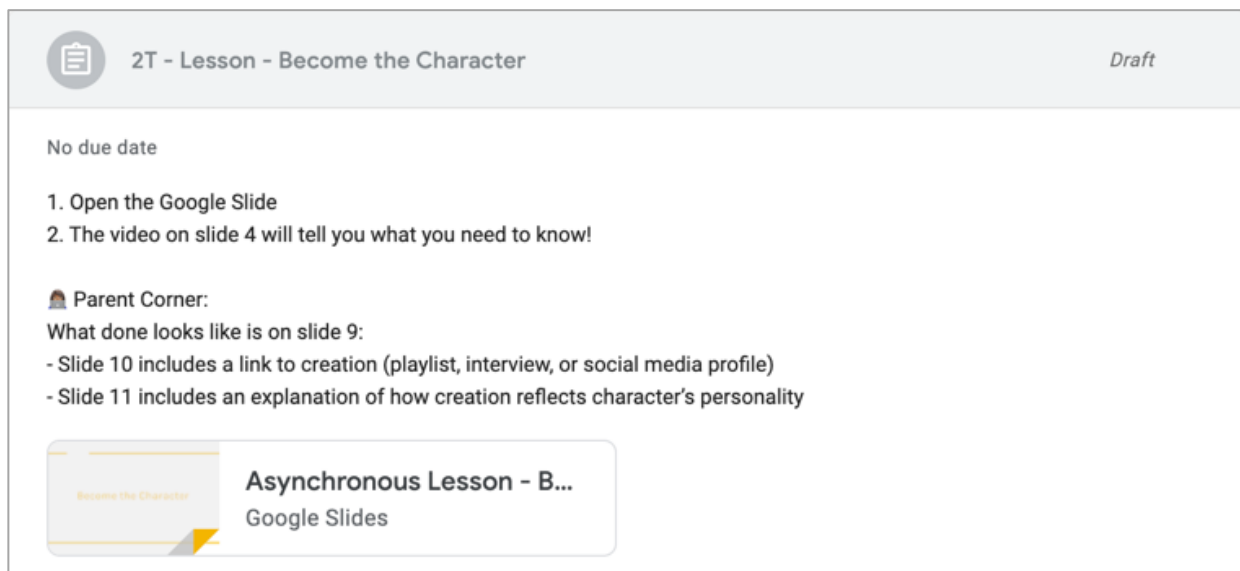
I highly recommend connecting this type of communication to the digital homebase, if possible. This is why it is so important to have a homebase tool with

solid caregiver communication. 💡 The reason I recommend connecting to the homebase is because caregiver communication will look similar to, if not the same as, the student view.

It is confusing for caregivers to see a view that is completely different than the student view.

Another tip for grown-up communication is to answer this question in regard to learning tasks: What does “done” look like? One of the most frequent challenges teachers expressed in early 2020 was students not submitting completed work. I would ask, “Did you tell the student (and subsequently the caregiver) what ‘done’ looks like for that task?” A simple “what does ‘done’ look like” checklist as shown in [Figure 13.4](#) empowers caregivers to determine if their student has really completed all learning tasks.

Figure 13.4: A Parent Corner and “What Does ‘Done’ Look Like?” Checklist in Google Classroom



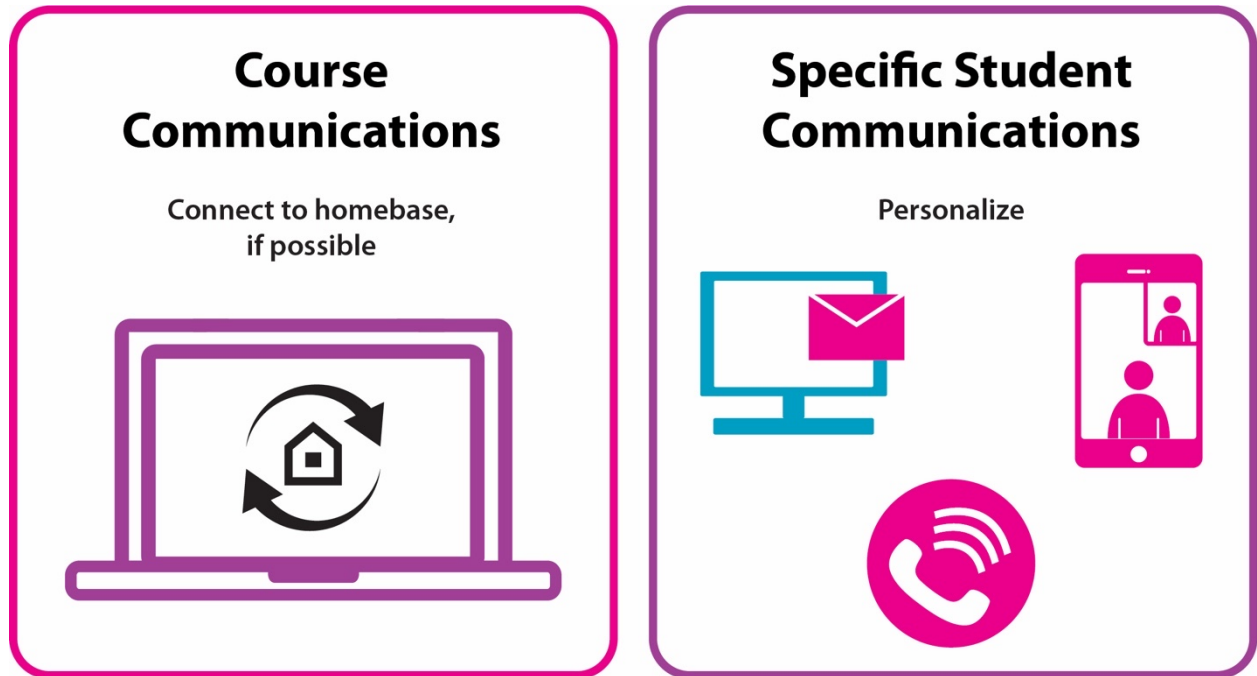
Communications regarding a Specific Student

You are going to be communicating with caregivers regarding their students. 📌 You may have to personalize this type of communication. As Nikki explained, ask in your parent survey what their preferred mode of communication is and try to match that communication mode as much as you can. For example, you may have a parent whose first language is not English. That parent may not feel comfortable

talking on the phone but may reply to written messages because written communication offers more time to translate than verbal communication does.

In summary, there may not be a one-size-fits-all communication solution for the one-on-one communications with caregivers. Keep a spreadsheet of preferred one-on-one communication methods. However, you can still streamline communications regarding course information as illustrated in [Figure 13.5](#).

Figure 13.5: Course versus Student Communications



Summary

This section outlines the most important parts from the chapter:

- In online learning, the grown-ups in your learners' lives take a very active role in their children's formal learning.
- The more prepared and knowledgeable caregivers feel about online learning, the more successful their children will be in an online learning environment.
- As an online teacher, you have to be strategic about supporting caregivers.
- Caregiver support should be addressed as part of all online learning initiatives.
- Strong parent-teacher relationships build the foundation for communication between home and school.
- Provide ongoing support to families as they develop routines to support home learning.

Reflection

After reading "[Chapter 13: Supporting Grown-Ups](#)," reflect on how the content can be applied to your unique learning environment. Share your reflections online using the hashtag #TeachersOnlineGuide.

- 👉 Does your family communication plan need to be tweaked?
- 👉 Could you survey families about their communication preferences?
- 👉 What tools are you currently using for family communication? Will you change or streamline the tools you are using?
- 👉 Are you able to collaborate with other teachers at your educational institution to ensure caregivers are not being asked to manage too many tools across grade levels?
- 👉 What is your final plan for supporting and communicating with your students' caregivers?

Bring Lindy to Your School or Event!

I would love to work with your school to implement any of the strategies in this book, as well as other digital teaching and learning strategies. I have been leading professional development sessions for over ten years. My style is to create learning experiences that are hands-on, applicable, and engaging. I always customize the learning goals to the needs of the school or event. Email lindy@intechgratedpd.org for more information.

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