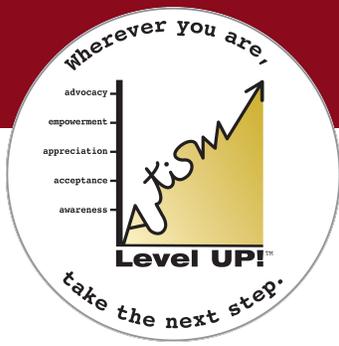


Living and Learning at Home during a Pandemic



Tools For Parents and Carers



Living and Learning at Home during a Pandemic

Facts and Context of the Situation:

- There was no way to predict and prepare for this “new normal”
- It is still NEW and it is not yet NORMAL
- For most families the shift to distance learning has been challenging and for some it has been almost impossible
- Predictability and routine, which serve as a foundation for comfort and regulation, have been totally disrupted
- Family members have become more responsible for schoolwork and education
- Children are ALWAYS learning
- This is a challenging situation

Why is it so challenging?

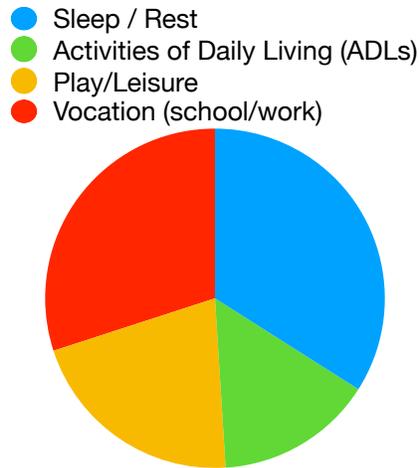
First let's think about the occupations (activities) that make up our day:



- **Sleep and Rest** are critical protective factors in making sure we stay well regulated and healthy.
- **Activities of Daily Living** are the very basic essentials for keeping our bodies in top operating condition (e.g. eating, bathing, grooming, going to the bathroom, changing clothes, etc.)
- **Play and Leisure** are those activities that bring us joy! They rejuvenate and recharge us. They definitely look different for everyone.
- **Vocations** are activities where you are productive. They include school and work and often (but not always) involve some sort of outside structure.

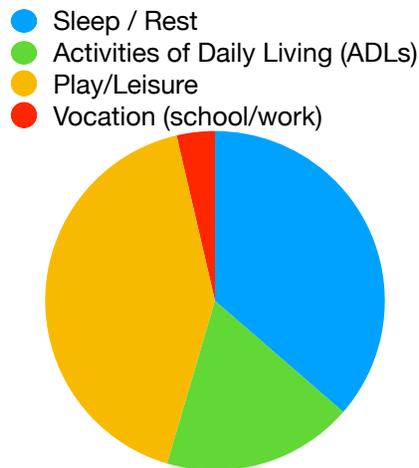
Now, let's consider these activities / occupations for a student in the context of a typical weekday that includes going to school. A student's day may be represented by a chart that looks something like this:

1. Typical Weekday Including Going to School



Next, let's compare that pie chart to one representing the occupational (activity) balance for a student at home on a typical weekend day / vacation day (pre-pandemic). A student's graph may have looked something like this:

2. Typical Weekend Day (pre-pandemic)



For younger students, the RED (school/work) piece of the pie may have even been ZERO on weekends and vacations (pre-pandemic).

Looking at the above charts, the confusion being expressed by many students regarding how they are "supposed to be spending their time" at home and the refusal to do so much work at home makes COMPLETE sense.

But, they are still students and this is the school year - so there is still learning to be done and assignments to complete.

However, we cannot assume that we can jump right into “recreating the school day” at home. We need to be a bit more realistic.

First, we need to keep those two pie charts in mind! We also need to consider what that “Red Piece” of a Typical Weekday including Going to School (1) truly looks like. You may notice that Vocation (red) is a large portion of the student’s day as all 6.5 hours of school are labeled as vocation. In reality that piece of the chart can be further broken down to give us a more accurate understanding of what truly happens during those 6.5 hours and show that student’s are not engaged in 6.5 hours of non-stop vocation productivity. That “Red Piece” may actually look more like this:

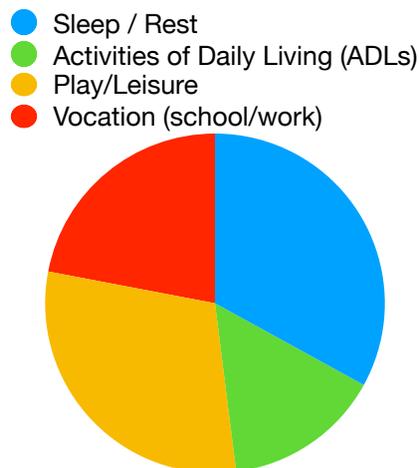
3. Estimation of Typical Time in School Environment (based on 6.5 hour day)



For younger students, there may even be sleep and rest (blue) included!

Therefore, our original chart (pie chart 1, pg. 2) for a Typical Weekday including Going to School should look more like this:

4. MORE ACCURATE Typical Weekday Including Going to School



Which is important to consider in determining a sustainable balance of activities that will make up “our new typical days learning at home during a pandemic.”

It's important to note the SIZE of the "Yellow Piece" of the chart (Play/Leisure). These are the parts of a day that bring JOY and fun. They re-energize and regulate our children (and us)! This is why it should be a BIG piece on any given day! (In every one of these charts!)

Ok, so now what?

We cannot negate the impact of:

- STRESS,
- Disrupted routine,
- Decreased predictability,
- Unanticipated expectations from others for how to spend time at home
- Etc.

When we experience such things we are more likely to become dysregulated, disorganized, and less available for learning and engaging overall! **These are all part of living through a pandemic and the physical closure of schools.**

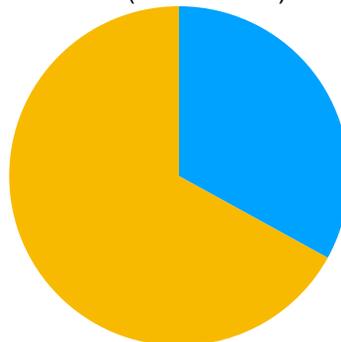
Which of our actives can buffer dysregulation?

The occupation most likely to counter stress and to help regulate is Play and Leisure. What does that mean? It means that in times of stress and uncertainty, in order to feel engaged and grounded, we NEED to increase that piece of the pie chart. It is essential to our well-being and to our ability to engage with less preferred tasks.

Is that the only thing we need to do now that schools are physically closed?

- Sleep / Rest
- Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
- Play/Leisure
- Vocation (school/work)

5. Should our children's pie charts look like this during this period of learning at home?



No, not exactly, but we SHOULD recognize that our children will NATURALLY make it a bigger part of their day and we should support that. It is a HEALTHY coping strategy in the face of unprecedented change in their worlds.

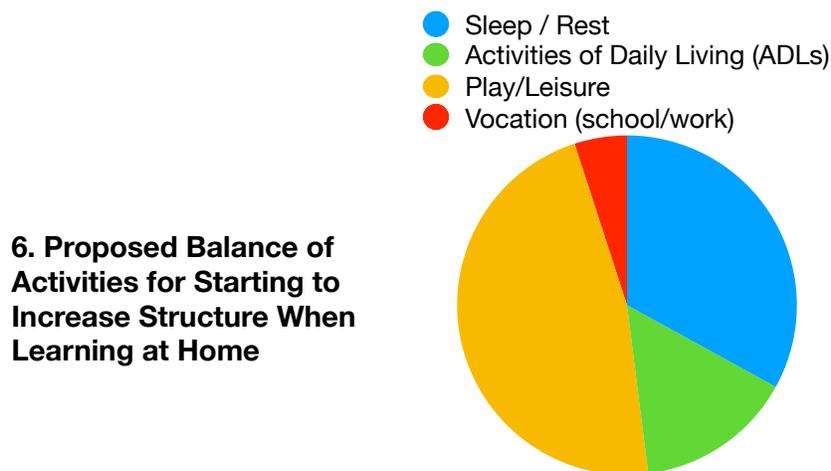
Luckily, in addition to Play/Leisure activities, there are many other strategies and tools that we can use to help support regulation and availability for learning and engaging.

These things include:

- creating structure and predictability (e.g., schedules, time tables),
- making sure activities are motivating and meaningful (e.g., functional, hands-on, and engaging),
- supporting autonomy (e.g. empowering children to make choices),
- making sure a child has access to the supports they need to communicate (e.g., visuals),
- making sure that a child has consistent access to their regulation strategies during activities (e.g., moving during learning, fidgets, stimulating, etc)

And, guess what? ALL of these strategies can be incorporated in ADLs, Vocations, and Play/Leisure! So, we have many tools we can use as we consider how best to build the structure of our children's "new typical days learning at home during a pandemic."

We can start to use ALL of these strategies to build the foundation for regulation in this new context, keeping in mind the balance of occupations / activities should look different as we support children dealing with the challenges of school closures and stay at home orders. Maybe, to start our children's days look more like this:



Engaging in passions and interests is often very soothing. Withholding and/or making children "earn" these activities is counterproductive and often contributes to dysregulation.

And, remember PLAY is LEARNING! So, even if your children aren't engaged in traditional classroom tasks, that doesn't mean they are not learning.

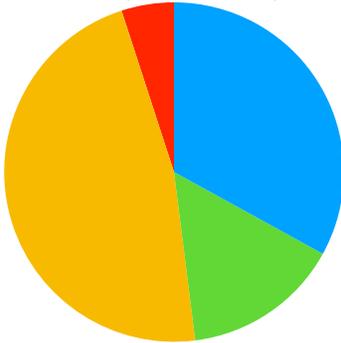
During this very unpredictable time, our children's days should be centered around what is regulating and comforting (Play/Leisure) and the occupations that keep them safe and their bodies operating in top condition (Sleep/Rest and ADLs). **Once we have met those needs, THEN we can think about engaging them in Vocational tasks (School).**

How do we build “new typical days learning at home during a pandemic?”

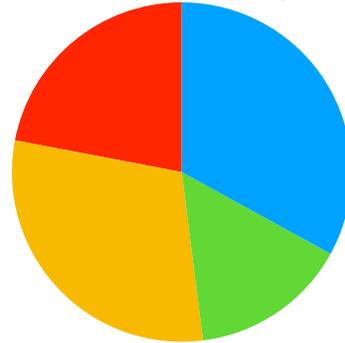
We think about starting here :

And, working towards here:

- 7a**
- Sleep / Rest
 - Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
 - Play/Leisure
 - Vocation (school/work)

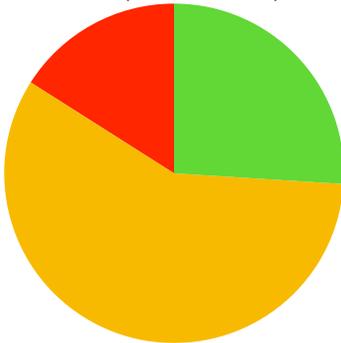


- 8a**
- Sleep / Rest
 - Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
 - Play/Leisure
 - Vocation (school/work)

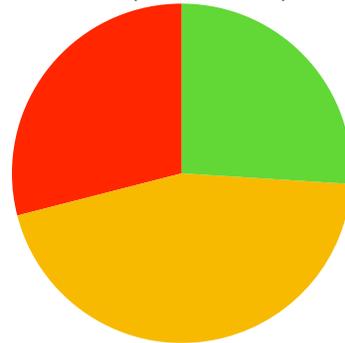


What does that look like for just waking hours?

- 7b**
- Sleep / Rest
 - Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
 - Play/Leisure
 - Vocation (school/work)



- 8b**
- Sleep / Rest
 - Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
 - Play/Leisure
 - Vocation (school/work)



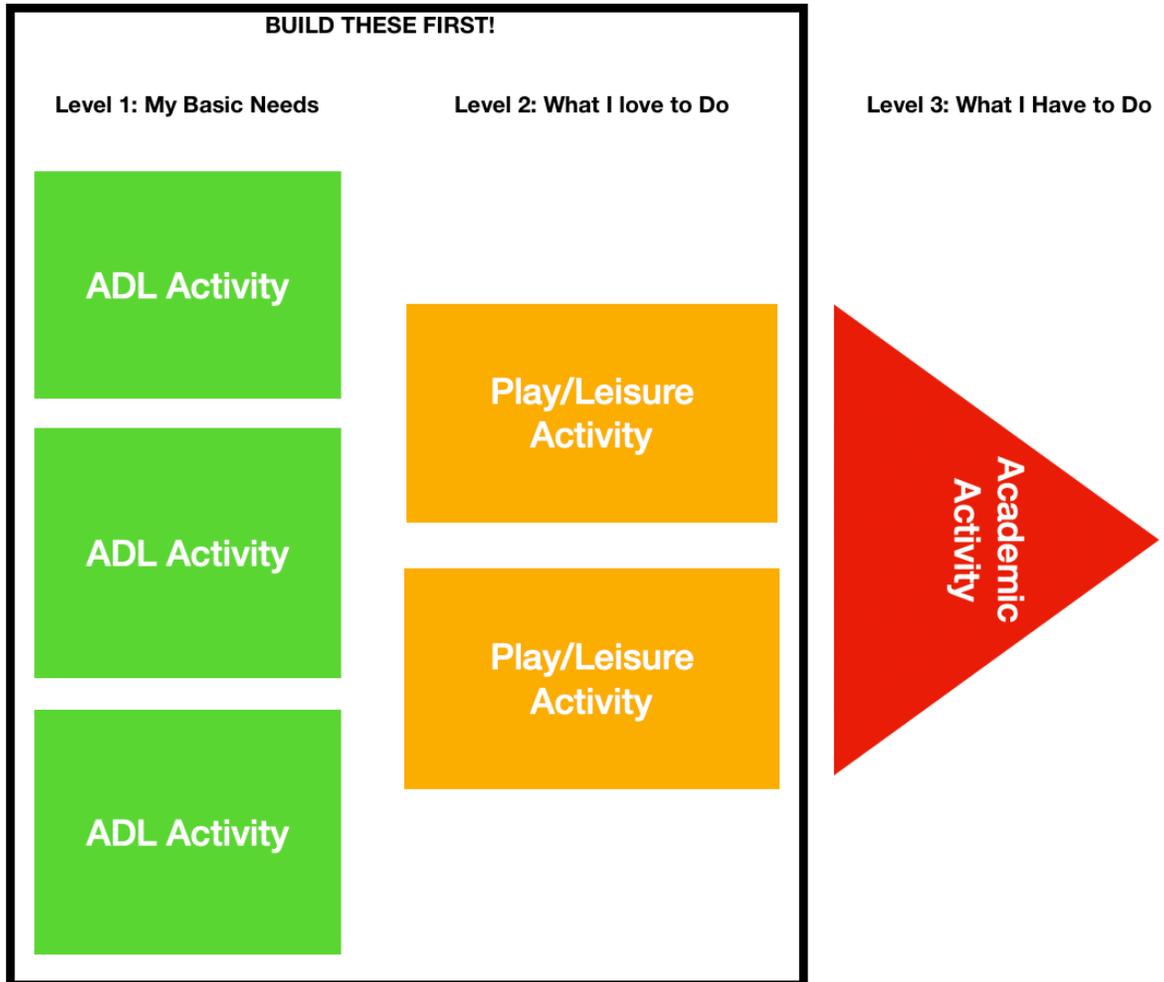
Please continue to note the SIZE of the “Yellow Piece” (Play / Leisure) in every chart. These are the parts of our day that bring JOY and fun. Remember that these are also the parts that are most effective at re-energizing and regulating for our children (and for us)! Also remember that we LEARN through play and play is not failure to engage academically.

Let's operationalize WHERE TO START:

Start with those Play/Leisure and ADL's - they should go into the schedule first! They build the foundation. Provide structure for each of these. This will ensure basic needs are met and help build predictability and familiarity with using a more structured schedule at home. Once, our children are consistently engaging in those scheduled activities (given the structure and supports needed to be successful) then add in an academic-vocational task.

The proportion of activities should look something like this:

**Planning Form
Figure 1**



Wait? Aren't the ADL parts of the Pie Charts (pg 6) smaller than the Play and Leisure parts? Why are there more ADL blocks in this planning sheet than Play and Leisure blocks?

ADL's are likely to take less time, so even though they are represented by a smaller proportion of time on the pie chart (7b) we've included 3 blocks here. Getting dressed, eating, and going to the bathroom are a great place to start as you work with your child to build a schedule. Then add in some Play/Leisure activities for regulation, grounding, and joy before attempting to add ONE academic task.

Make sure that for EACH of the activities, regardless of whether it is ADL, Play/Leisure, or Academic in nature, you are considering all of the regulation tools we've discussed.

Is the activity:

- **structured and predictable** (e.g., are there visual supports or a known time limit),
- **motivating and meaningful** (e.g., is it functional, hands-on, engaging and does it incorporate interests whenever possible),
- **supportive of autonomy** (e.g. child has choices within activity or deciding when it is completed)
- **structured to support communication** (e.g., visual supports and alternative augmentative communication if needed),
- **structured to provide access to the child's regulation strategies** during activities (e.g., moving during learning, fidgets, stimming, etc)

Don't be overwhelmed by these considerations. This doesn't mean that every activity will have every element, but it does mean that if you see your child becoming dysregulated in an activity, you will want to consider each of these dimensions and determine if support is needed in one of the areas listed above.

We recommend creating a "choice board" (like the one below) from which you and your child can pick activities to fill in the blocks of the Planning Form (Figure 1).

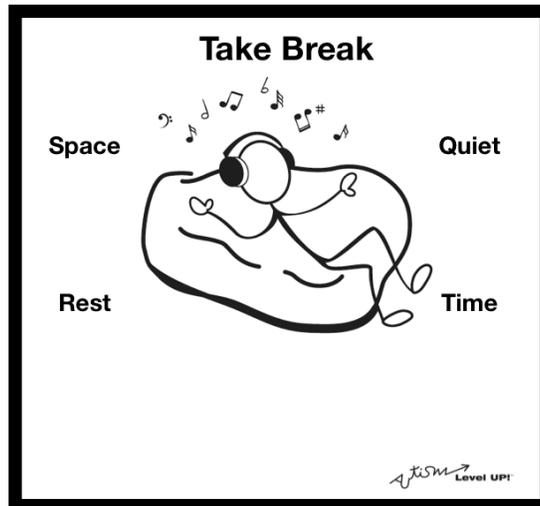
**Activity Choice Board
Figure 2**

ADLs	Play / Leisure	Academic Activities

A couple other things that are critical!

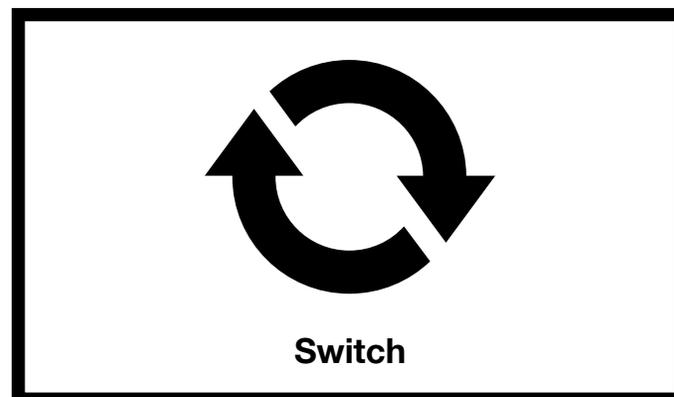
1: Your child should always have the option to take a break if they are becoming dysregulated in an activity. The key here is that the function of a break is always to return and finish the task... it is not to get out of something. It is to get whatever regulating input they need to actually get “back into” something. We recommend having a “break” card available for children to request or for you to suggest!

**Figure 4
Break Card**



2. Your child might not need a break, but they might want to make a switch in activities. They may want to move away from an activity for a bit to pick something else on their schedule to engage in at that moment. Think about it as hitting the pause button and shifting attention for a little while and then coming back to finish later. We all do this at times during our days, so our children should have the option, too. We also recommend having a “switch” card available for children to request or for you to suggest!

**Figure 5
Switch Card**



3. There are many resources to help you start to find a balance of activities (occupations) that works for your child (and your family) and to support their regulation in general.

For example, Autism Level UP! has free downloadable resources for:

- supporting Energy Regulation (there are many)- <http://amy-laurent.com/category/supports-resources/>
- accessing online learning platform Zoom: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LOhYWIEzlo6Y6qOQdttvG99pSNqz1DjM?usp=sharing>
- accessing online learning platform Google Meets: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vwMmb_9wm-9nfps4puFZCVdpRucBU9y?usp=sharing
- Power Plays- Fun, theme-based sensory motor regulation activities. Visual supports for these regulation routines (i.e., animals, quidditch, super heroes) : https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1hnd58ISH4wtzMSiRE4SIK1Rjno_0f2kb?usp=sharing
- These Power Play regulation routines have corresponding video models found at : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLHr8gQ9ZsIHccgr5UtDRTw>

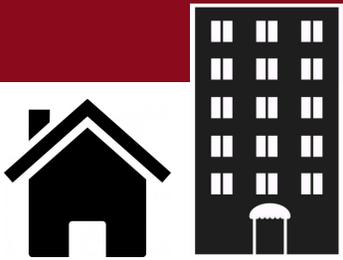
4. This almost goes without saying, but your child's teacher and school staff are AMAZING resources! They know your child in the context of learning in the classroom. They know what kind of visual supports and structures help your child succeed in academic activities. Make sure you access them and ask them questions - not just about content of lessons, but about the supports they use to help your child succeed. Brainstorm together about ways to replicate these supports at home.

5. When in doubt, Play it out! Play is learning! Play happens at school all the time! In fact, you could probably use more play in your day, too! Remember, learning and regulation happen during play. If you get your child used to SCHEDULING their play time in terms of using a timer and understanding when and why play is ending (meals, ADLS, etc.), doing the same thing with vocation and work will be more natural.

6. To the extent possible, ALWAYS involve and include your child in making decisions about their schedule. Review the Learning at Home Story that goes along with these supports with your child. Make sure your child is AWARE of and understands that you all are trying to work together to build a new schedule and routine at home. You may make one of these schedules for your own work day to model for your child and show them that this is a change for EVERYONE.

7. Not every day will look the same and that is OK. **Really it is more than OK.** We are all capable of different things on different days. The key is that you (and your child) are responsive to their energy and focus on any given day. Regulation must come first. It is the foundation for learning and engaging and without it, you will both be stuck in a no-win situation.

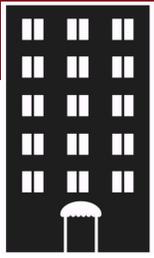
Please refer to appendix for printable versions of the Figures/Forms and the Learning at Home Story.



Living and Learning at Home during a Pandemic

Story for the Learner





Living and Learning at Home during a Pandemic



Covid-19 is also called Corona Virus or Novel Corona Virus. It is making people sick all over the world and this is called a pandemic. In an effort to make sure we are not spreading the Corona Virus, it is important to stay home as much as possible. That is why children are staying home from school and parents are staying home from work.



Right now my school is closed and no one is going to the school building. My teachers are not going to the school building. My classmates are not going to the school building. I am not going to the school building.



But school is still in session. My teachers are still working and my classmates and I are still learning. Even though my school building is closed, it is still the school year, and I am still a student. Students are learners. In order to learn I still need to do school work and meet with my teacher on the computer.



I will do these things at home. This means that I still have school work to complete every day, even though I am not in my usual school building. I will be learning and doing school work at home just like my parents are doing their “job” or work at home, too.



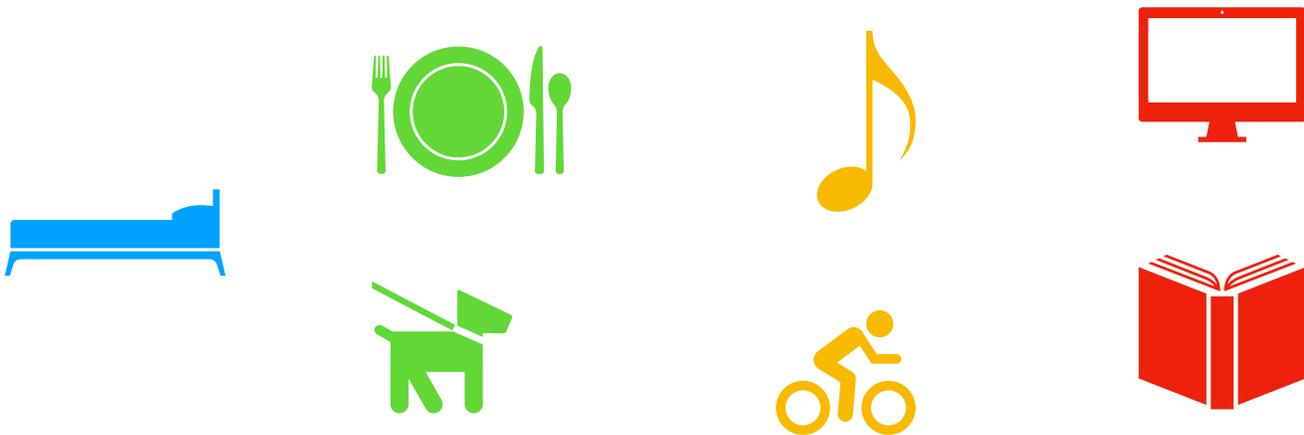
This means my days and my time at home are VERY different than they were before school buildings closed. I do not go to my classroom. I do not see my teachers and classmates in school. My home is now where I will do my school work until it is safe for us to go back to the school building.

My family members know change is hard. They are working to make sure I feel comfortable and can focus during the pandemic. They are also helping me to learn at home. They may be doing things, saying things or asking things of me that my teachers normally would.

Everything is different right now. Things have changed and no one knew that these changes were coming. These changes have been very difficult for everyone.

One way my family can help me deal with all of this change and help me learn at home is help me create a new Living and Learning at Home Schedule.

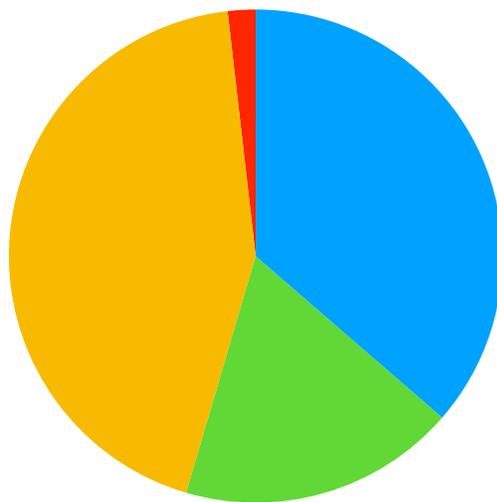
When we create a new Living and Learning at Home Schedule for my days at home it will include sleep and daily activities like eating and getting dressed. It will also include my favorite activities and play. Learning activities will also be a part of my day, but just like in school, they will not be my ENTIRE day.



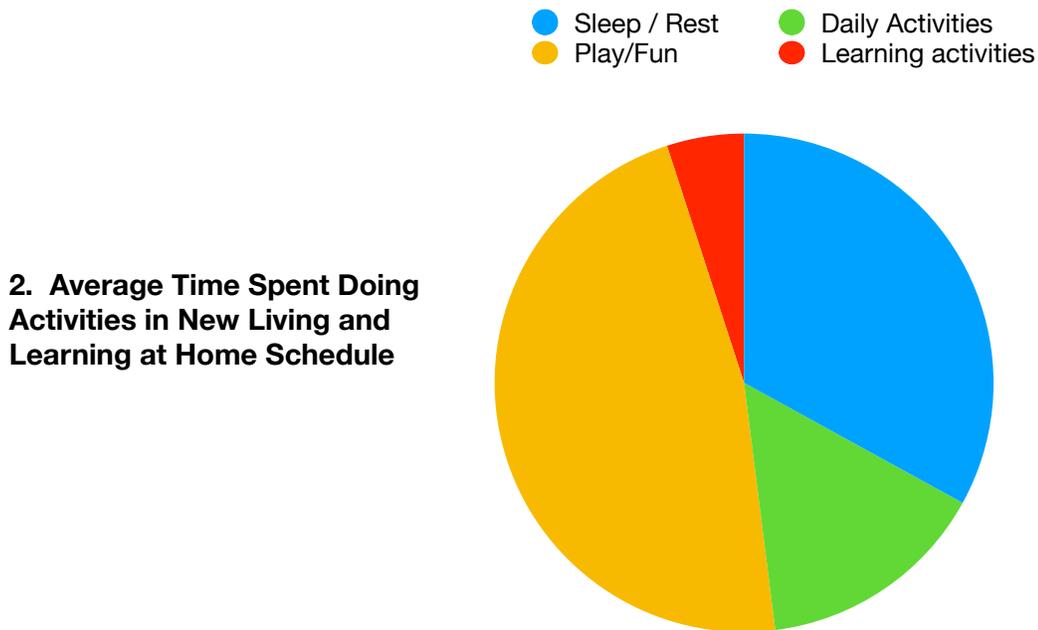
Before the pandemic and the closing of school buildings, I may have spent very little time doing learning activities at home. Maybe my daily schedule looked like this:



1. Average Time Spent Doing Activities During a Typical Weekend Day at Home (pre-pandemic)



Now that we are home because of the pandemic, on days that are “school days” more of my time at home may be spent doing learning activities. To start, my days at daily schedule at home may look something like this:

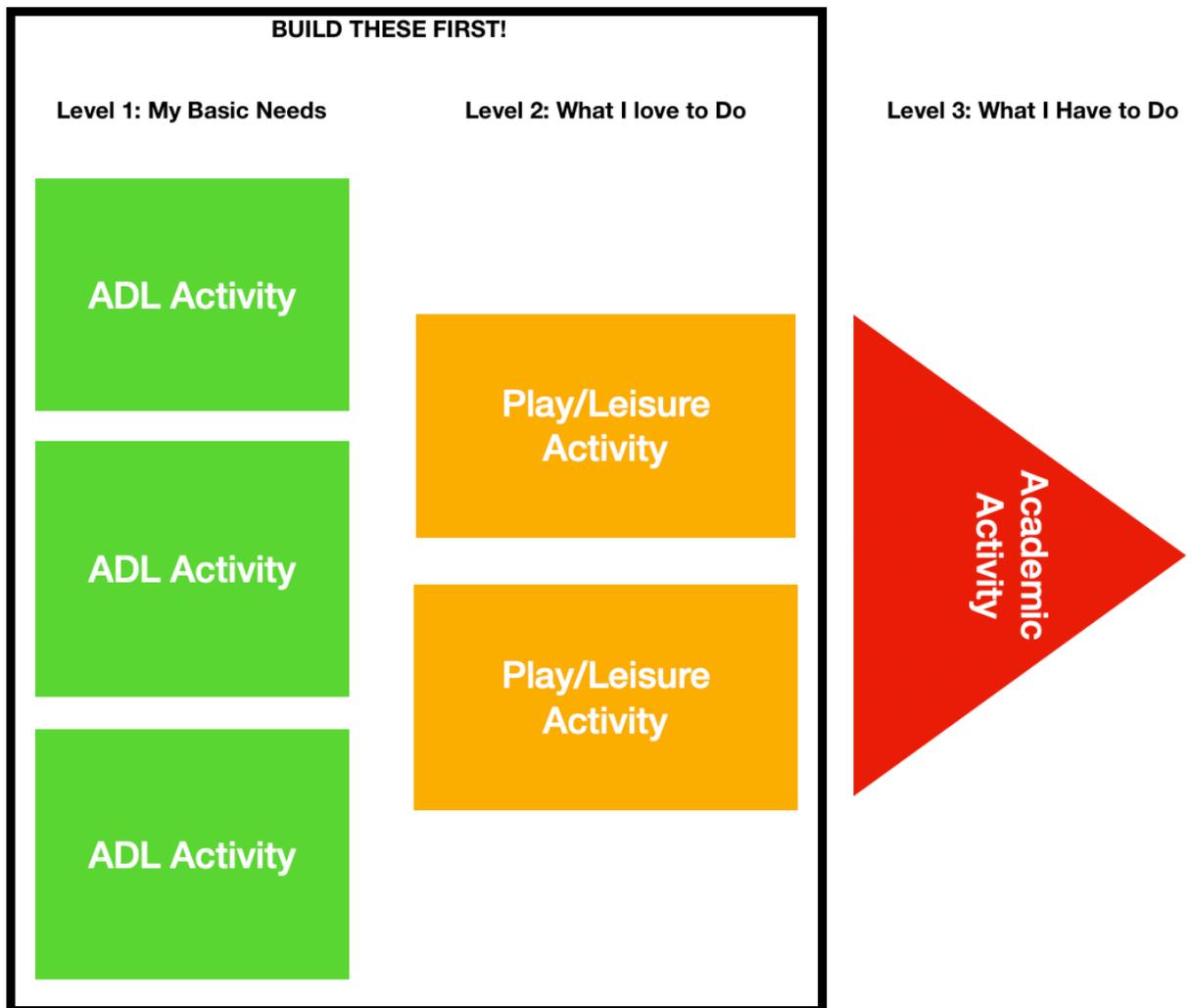


I should have lots of opportunities for Play/Fun activities, as these are activities that help me feel comfortable and can help me focus. They can also help me learn.

My family and I can schedule some of my favorite activities throughout my day. They can be scheduled during my day for specific amounts of time. My family may help me use a timer so I know when these activities is done.

To create my new Living and Learning at Home Schedule, my family and I can use this Planning Form. It will us plan a balance of different types of activities. My new schedule will have things that I need like sleep and eating, things I want to do like play, relax and have fun, and the things that I have to do as part of my school day at home.

**Planning Form
Figure 1**



My family and I can choose the activities that I want to include in my Living and Learning at Home Schedule from the Choice Board.

Activity Choice Board
Figure 2

ADLs	Play / Leisure	Academic Activities

To start I will pick three green activities, two yellow activities, and one red activity.

Next my family and I can put the activities that we have picked into a Living and Learning at Home Schedule that works for our family. We can order these activities however it makes the most sense to us. If I find that the order of the activities does not work for me, I can make a new order or ask my family members to help me make a new order of activities to try.

Remember, this is a big change for everyone, so it may take some time to find an order that works. It is okay if it does not work the first time!

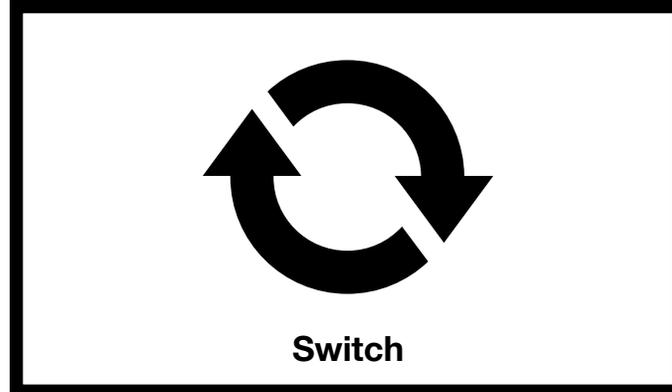
When I am using this schedule I may still become overwhelmed or unfocused. If I do, I can take a break. When I take a break, I should do something that helps me feel focused so that I can come back and finish the activity that I took a break from. I can use a card like this to let my family know I need a break.

**Figure 4
Break Card**



Sometimes I might not need a break, but I may want to do a different activity on my schedule. If I feel this way, I can ask to switch activities. I know that I will need to finish the first activity later. I can use a card like this to ask my family to switch activities.

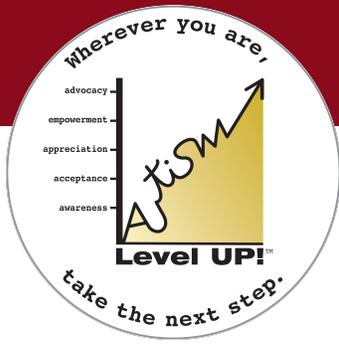
**Figure 5
Switch Card**



As I am learning to put my Living and Learning Home Schedule together my family and my teachers will help me. My teachers may even have some of the same types of supports that I use at school to help me at home with my learning activities.



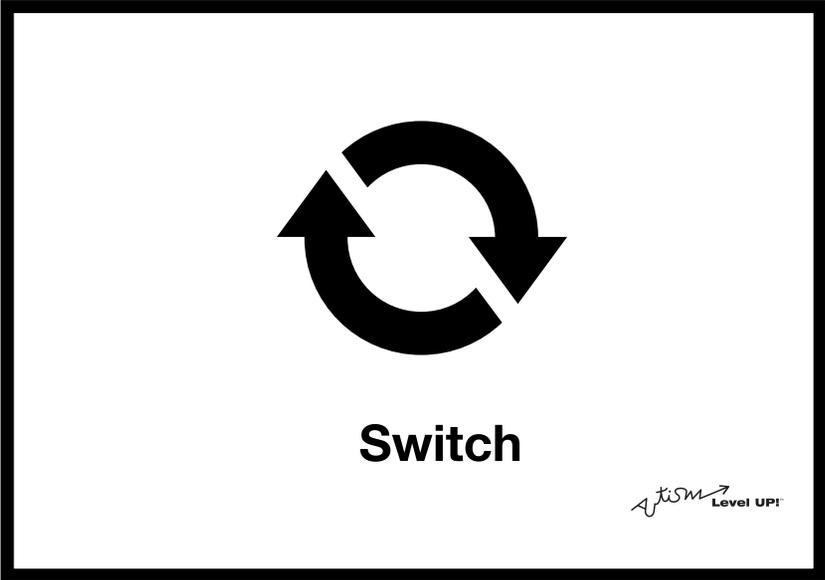
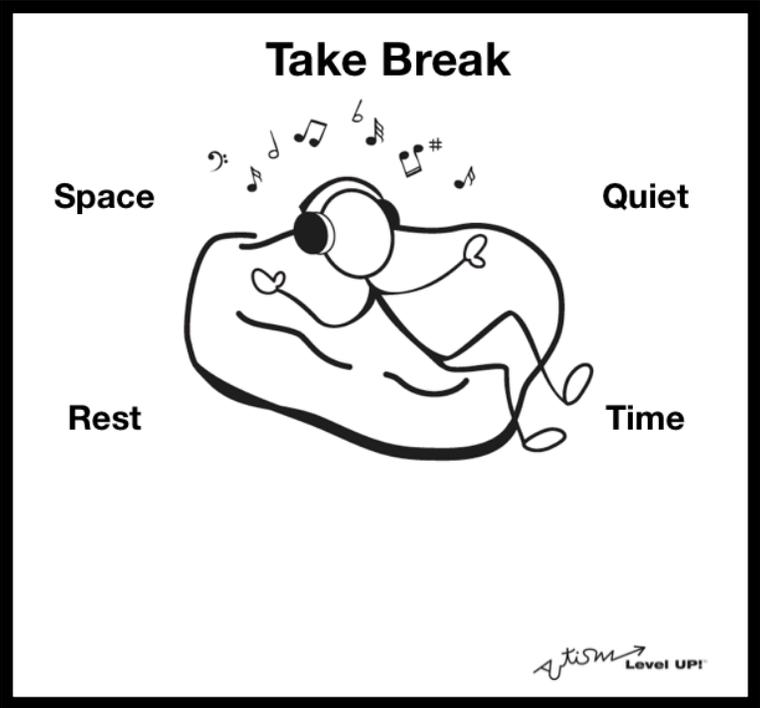
The pandemic will not last forever. School buildings will not always be closed. One day, my teachers, classmates and I will go back to my school building and back to learning in classrooms. My teachers and family will tell me what day I will be going back to school when they know. For now, they will focus on helping me learn from home.



Living and Learning at Home during a Pandemic

Visual Supports and Tools

ADLs	Play / Leisure	Academic Activities



BUILD THESE FIRST!

Level 1: My Basic Needs

Level 2: What I love to Do

Level 3: What I Have to Do

ADL Activity

ADL Activity

ADL Activity

Play/Leisure Activity

Play/Leisure Activity

Academic Activity

