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Ultimate Back-to-School Guide for Parents

by Haley Zapal | Aug 13, 2020 | Bark for Schools, Parenting Tips

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Whether your child's school is starting back full-time, part-time, online, or a

combination of all three, your goal as a parent is still the same — to make sure they're learning in the best and safest way possible.

In this three-part back-to-school guide, you'll find helpful tips for optimizing online safety, the best recommendations for distance learning laptops, and some of the best free educational resources to help make homework and studying a breeze.

Online Safety Tune-up

While your kids probably got a fair amount of screen time this summer (phones, tablets, TV, and video games — oh my!), now is the time to get back in the habit of setting healthy boundaries and learning about digital dangers. Here are 10 ways to help protect your kid online as they transition back to school.

1. Set parental controls to limit distractions

The Barkomatic is the internet's first customizable resource for parental controls. No matter how your child uses the internet, we can provide you with all the information you need quickly, easily, and in one location.

2. Find out how kids use Google Docs for cyberbullying

Google Docs has become popular in schools, with many children using it for schoolwork, homework assignments, and even group projects. But kids are incredibly inventive, and they've managed to turn Google Docs into a de facto communication and social media hub. Confused? We break it down for you in this blog post.

3. Create a technology contract

A technology contract is a great way for your family to collaborate on rules for using devices and accessing the internet. It can help make sure the whole family is on the same page about how to get the most out of technology, and — most importantly — how to stay safer online.

4. Make use of apps to connect with other parents

While you're probably not arranging for carpool pickups and dropoffs right now, **communicating with the guardians** of your children's friends can be a good source of support, information, and even humor while you navigate online schooling.

5. Refamiliarize yourself with Zoom

If it's been a few months since your kids had a Zoom chemistry lesson, check out **this blog post** for a quick refresher. You can also learn some helpful Zoom hacks to make the entire experience safer for them.

6. Encourage healthy digital habits

Kids look to their parents to learn how the world works, and it's up to us to make sure we're passing on **good digital habits** — from setting good examples to establishing digital boundaries.

7. Host a virtual tech night

This **Tech Night Resources page** is filled with everything you'd need to help educate families in your communities about technology and social media, including free videos, downloadable PDFs, and more.

8. Get support for teaching kids with special needs

Use this **page of resources** to learn more about how to advocate for kids with special needs during this time of remote learning, which can be especially challenging in virtual classroom settings.

9. Take a crash course in Chromebooks

Chromebooks have become the go-to tech device for students across the U.S., but did you know they're not *exactly* laptops? Learn more about these versatile computers in this **blog post**.

10. Learn more about your kid's school-issued tech

Many students get access to **digital technologies** like cloud storage for the first time at school, and parents may not be familiar with them — or their risks.

Best Laptops for Learning

If your child is looking at another semester of distance learning — and their school doesn't provide technology — you may be in the market for a new laptop. Here are a few of the most popular and powerful computers for kids.

Lenovo IdeaPad 1

\$209.99

This lightweight laptop has up to eight hours of battery life to get your kid through even the longest of school days. With purchase, you get a complimentary year-long subscription of Microsoft Office 365, which includes Word, Powerpoint, Excel, and more. Also, Lenovo's LanSchool and Bark have **partnered together** to provide award-winning edtech solutions to help keep students safe online.

13-inch MacBook Air

\$999.00

This choice is a great laptop for teens who aren't as prone to dropping things — they're incredibly thin and lightweight. A MacBook Air is more expensive than many comparable laptops, but for dedicated Apple families, it's a great first laptop that integrates well into your existing ecosystem.

Microsoft Surface Laptop 3

\$799.99

This laptop is stylish and has several sleek metallic colors to choose from. It's lightweight and features an impressive all-day battery. There are also amazing Microsoft accessories to pair with the Surface Laptop 3, including Surface Earbuds, the Surface Arc Mouse (if you kid hates using the touchpad), and the Surface Pen to make taking notes easier.

Dell Chromebook 3100 Education

\$249.00

For younger kids, this is a perfect durable first laptop. It's made to withstand the wear and tear of daily use and accidents, and the keyboard is even spill-

resistant for up to 12 ounces of liquid (for those lunchtime study sessions). Along with its 14-hour battery life, the Dell Chromebook 3100 is sure to keep up with whatever your kid can throw at it (literally).

Acer Chromebook 314

\$229.99

With impressive Intel processing, the Acer Chromebook 314 makes sophisticated classroom projects run smoother and faster. Physically larger than most laptops and Chromebooks, this can come in handy for educational videos and screen sharing – especially if your kid is going to be remote learning in the fall.

Incredible Online Educational Resources

With free educational resources for nearly every subject and learning style available through a quick Google search, there's no better time to learn from home than now. These links are just a few of the amazing websites that kids can access to help them ace their next test or write that perfect English paper.

Khan Academy

This nonprofit website provides dozens of in-depth lessons on everything from trigonometry to world history. Perfect for middle and high schoolers, **Khan Academy** features videos, interactive problems, and more.

Quizlet

Flashcards always worked when you were a kid and they still work today – they've just gone digital! With **Quizlet**, your child can create their own sets of flashcards to work on memorizing key concepts, or they can browse ready-made cards on a variety of topics.

Duolingo

There's no better way to have fun while studying Spanish or French than playing the fun mobile game **Duolingo**. In just a few minutes a day, your kid can enrich their classroom learning with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Shmoop

Remember CliffsNotes? **Shmoop** is even better because it's actually fun! These humor-injected study guides and study tools make learning easier – and your kid may even be inspired to read more, too.

Desmos

Fancy graphing calculators can be a necessary (and expensive) tool for advanced math classes. **This free app** does all the work of a TI-82 without the hefty price tag. It even features a lockdown mode for use during exams.

About Bark

Bark is a comprehensive online safety solution that empowers families to monitor content, manage screen time, and filter websites to help protect their kids online. Our mission is to give parents and guardians the tools they need to raise kids in the digital age.

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