



## Guide to Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students *Learning From Home*

Providing all students with continuity and educational engagement is the first and foremost priority for school leaders and classroom teachers during the COVID-19 crisis. This can be a challenge as not all students have equitable access to technology, resources, internet access or support from home. In particular, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their children may require additional support to access *Learning From Home* platforms, along with tailored wellbeing and cultural support. This guide provides school leaders and classroom teachers with some important reminders and considerations when planning support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' transition to and engagement with *Learning From Home* as a new norm.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING FROM HOME

The key to successful teaching and learning from home is to have a deep understanding of the individual student and the specific context within which their learning will take place.

Considerations include:

- Extent of family/ community support
- Wellbeing and safety of the student
- Number of siblings learning from the same home
- Access to devices, internet access and data restrictions
- Family and community responsibilities and expectations.

Without an understanding of these areas, school expectations may not be able to be reflected in the home. This may lead to additional tensions within the family, disconnection with education and misunderstanding between the home and school and/ or between students and their family members.



## STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN *LEARNING FROM HOME*

### Communicating and connecting with parents/carers

Maintaining continuous connection with the parents/carers/educational supporters in the student's life is the leading strategy for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student successfully transitioning to *Learning From Home*. School leaders and teachers may consider:

- Weekly phone calls to check-in on the wellbeing and needs of the family.
- Facetime/What's App/Zoom Yarning groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers to create a safe group where members can openly share successes and concerns.
- Taking time to consider the individual home context of each student and the demand that *Learning From Home* places on the family – traditional lesson times may need to be adjusted.
- Providing Care Packages to families that may require additional support while children are home on a full-time basis.

### Collaboratively planning your student's day

Traditional school hours may be difficult for some students during this time due to the high demand of life at home, for example caring for younger siblings. When planning the learning schedule for the week or fortnight, it is recommended to plan in collaboration with the student and differentiating timetables and tasks to meet the student's learning environment. Teachers may consider:

- Conference calls with students and their parents/carers (where appropriate) to discuss and review plans for learning.
- Provide students with limited access to devices and internet access to recorded lessons.
- For secondary students, use adult learning principles and support students in developing their own learning schedules and task orientated goals for each day.

### Importance of Cultural Mentors and Support Services

Connecting to culture in a school setting is a leading strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement. During this time of isolation where students' cultural engagement with peers, family and community is limited, providing students with connection to a cultural mentor fills this gap and feeling of loss, along with boosting wellbeing and connectedness their peers. If students accessed counselling services and learning support prior to isolation, it is important that students are still able to access these support services. Schools may consider:

- Working with parents/carers to nominate appropriate times and places within the home for students to access counselling and support services.
- Identifying local support and cultural organisations that are continuing to provide local level support during COVID-19.
- Organising weekly Yarning online sessions with the school's Cultural Mentor and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage in cultural activities, for example weaving, art, dance, cultural lessons.

### Devices, Data and maintaining engagement

In many households across the country, the sudden introduction of *Learning From Home* meant that many families didn't have the opportunity or funds to prepare for their children's engagement in online learning. With many households owning only a single device (laptop, tablet, phone) and only intermittent internet connection available, student's engagement in learning may change from day to day. So how do we support families with multiple children, a single device and limited to no data?

- Talk with parents/carers about how and when their children will be able to access a device and plan face-to-face lessons around these times.
- Support parents/carers to access isolation data support from their telecommunication company (some companies are increasing their data packages for no cost).

- Loan students a device from the school's laptop/tablet pool.
- Organise internet dongles for families with no internet connection.
- Hard copy work is still an option – provide project work to students twice a week with all the resources they will require to complete the tasks. For students that are locally based, hand delivering to the front door (while maintaining social distancing) is also a way to check-in with the family. For students who live outside of the local area, mailing the work is the best option, but always remember to include a pre-paid postage envelop for the student to return their work. No matter the method, always follow up with a phone call to make sure they can complete the work provided.

### Connections with Curriculum

Students engage in the curriculum when their culture, history and context is reflected in the curriculum. This is an essential aspect to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students while *Learning From Home*. Providing students with opportunities to reflect on their culture, learn from their family and present their learnings to others will lead to long term engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers may consider:

- A Project Based learning approach to assignments that students are required to complete.
- Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in online learning units, for example engaging with the Reconciliation theme for this year.
- Including the importance of learning from family members about family history, cultural connections and learning from the land.
- Older students sharing their knowledge with their younger family members.

### Teacher professional learning: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners

Providing teachers with the appropriate knowledge and skills will support their transition to *Learning From Home*. Teachers who are supported during this period are more likely to be responsive to their students' individual needs. Increasing teachers' knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners is central to support their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students during

*Learning From Home* and may include:

- Understanding the importance of Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students (<https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/courses/pages/CourseDetails.aspx?clid=5e8ca5049f50451cb2417ad2969c9bb6>)
- Reviewing the findings from the AISNSW Pilot Project: Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students (<https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/funded-programs-and-projects/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-edu/improving-outcomes>)
- Connecting with your local NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/>)
- Contacting the AISNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultant for more information on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in your school context ([RThomas@aisnsw.edu.au](mailto:RThomas@aisnsw.edu.au))



Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to continue their educational engagement during COVID-19 will be crucial in supporting their transition back to school and for each student the level of support will differ. The one essential aspect to all educational strategies and support structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is maintaining trusting two-way relationships. In this time of change and uncertainty, it is these trusting relationships that will enable our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to continue their educational engagement in a safe and supportive community.





## ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AND INFORMATION:

Australian Government (Department of Health):  
Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and remote communities  
<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-remote-communities#resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

NSW Aboriginal Land Council Food Relief Program  
<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/nsw-aboriginal-land-council-community-support-20-april-2020-registration-102965181630>

This is a limited opportunity, also visit the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (<http://alc.org.au/nswalc-in-the-community/covid-19-updates.aspx#Food%20Relief%20program>) for further information.

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.  
<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/>

## FURTHER READINGS:

Education Matters Magazine: Shift to remote and home learning poses inequities  
<https://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/shift-to-remote-and-home-learning-poses-inequalities/>

Dare to Care Podcast: Navigating COVID-19 with Mark Morrison (April, 2020)  
<https://omny.fm/shows/dare-2-care-podcast/navigating-covid-19-with-mark-morrison>

Stuff: As a principal, it's bloody awful not knowing if our kids have eaten today (April, 2020)  
<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/120994472/as-a-principal-its-bloody-awful-not-knowing-if-our-kids-have-eaten-today>

Edutopia: 7 Guiding Principles for Parents Teaching From Home (April, 2020)  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/7-guiding-principles-parents-teaching-home>

Harvard Graduate School of Education: The Shift to Online Teaching (March, 2020)  
<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/03/shift-online-teaching>

Harvard Graduate School of Education: A Place of (Remote) Belonging (April, 2020)  
<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/04/place-remote-belonging>