

Remote Learning for Students with Autism and Developmental Disabilities

While the world reels from COVID-19, schools and teachers face an unprecedented need to meet students' learning needs in a virtual manner. Remote learning can take a variety of different forms, with certain methods working for some students but not others. A common response to distance learning for general education classrooms, has been online instructorless learning. This type of learning offers students flexibility on when they can engage with materials as well as provides opportunities for the student to work independently, allowing parents to work from home as necessary. However, instructorless learning does not meet every child's needs. While some students are suited to using a screen to engage with academic material, the instructorless method works better for practicing previously learned skills than learning new ones. Additionally, students enrolled in special education programs may not have the skills necessary to engage with a screen without support, and parents may struggle to find online material appropriate for their child's IEP goals and learning levels. The synchronous remote instruction method offers real-time instruction from a trained educator and allows for the advancement of skills, as opposed to pure maintenance of previously learned skills. It also is more appropriate for students who need the support of a teacher and are less able to engage solely with a screen.

The **STAR Online Learning System (SOLS)**, by STAR Autism Support, combines the best remote learning strategies by providing synchronous remote instruction using a highly qualified teacher to deliver IEP-driven curriculum. This type of instruction not only maintains skills but supports the development of new skills. SOLS also provides extension activities that parents can use without an instructor present and at-home packets that students can use independently to practice previously mastered skills on their own.

While in-person instruction is undoubtedly the most flexible teaching practice, SOLS offers the next best thing—teacher driven instruction which includes a continuum of parent-delivered instruction based on students' needs. Additional extension activities and independent work at home packets provide for learning opportunities beyond the remote sessions.



Remote Learning Curricula Components

Considerations when choosing a remote learning curriculum	Instructorless Learning	SOLS
Appropriate for students who are able to engage independently within a virtual learning environment.	X	X
Supports student's maintenance of previously learned skills.	X	X
Windows of time are created for parents/students to do "their own" work.	X	X
Synchronous remote instruction provided in real time by a trained educator addressing learner characteristics and targeting IEP goals and related services.		X
Appropriate for students who are not able to maintain engagement within a virtual learning environment.		X
Teacher-directed, parent-delivered instructional option to address learner characteristics.		X
Ability for teacher to address IEP goals through observation and continuous assessment of student needs.		X
Continuous learning throughout the day through extension activities and at-home packets.		X
Builds parental competence through real-time coaching, parent training, and parental access to environmental supports and resources.		X
Provides resources and supports to include siblings and family members in delivering instruction and extension activities.		X