



PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BLENDED/REMOTE LEARNING AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
EMIS	Education Monitoring Information System
GC4	General Comment 4 (CRPD)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OPD	Organization of persons with disabilities
TV	Television
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund



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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

This guide was created by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in response to the situation created by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. However, it is applicable as well to other circumstances when blended or remote learning might be necessary, including during emergencies. It focuses on providing **support to ALL children, particularly children with disabilities within inclusive settings.**

In this guide, two terms will be used frequently:

1. **Blended learning** is an approach to education that combines (i.e., blends) traditional face-to-face classroom practices with online materials and

interactions. Blended learning requires the teacher and student(s) to be present simultaneously, and it is a planned/controlled event. The term “hybrid learning” can also be used to describe this approach.

2. **Remote learning** occurs when the teacher and students are separated by time and distance and there is no interface between the two, but the teacher is still in control of the learning. Remote learning typically occurs during emergency situations.

These two terms differ from **distance learning**, which is a highly planned and controlled approach to education in which the student is in control of the learning process. In

distance learning, there is no expectation that the student and teacher will interact; content can be delivered via paper packets, radio, television (TV) or online. **Distance learning is not a focus of this guide.**

This practical guide to delivering blended or remote learning and support services was created to support school directors, teachers and other professionals in making decisions that ensure children from vulnerable populations – particularly children with disabilities – continue to receive education and associated services even when schools are physically closed. Therefore, in the sections below this guide will discuss:

1. The assumptions about inclusive education that are at the core of this guide.
2. What should happen before remote or blended education is implemented.
3. The basic concepts behind remote or blended education.

4. What education and school leaders/decision-makers should know and do in the event that remote or blended education becomes necessary.
5. What a teacher or service provider should know and do if their school is implementing remote or blended learning.
6. Suggestions on how to create more inclusive and equitable school systems upon return to school.

Across the world, children have asked us to reflect on the future of education and how we might take advantage of the mandatory pauses created by the pandemic to plan for more inclusive and equitable education everywhere. This practical guide does not promote an education system where children with disabilities are separated from their siblings and friends, but rather envisions education systems in which ALL children – without exception – have the same opportunities to participate in inclusive education.*

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT UNICEF AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

- ✓ Read the booklet 'Conceptualizing Inclusive Education and Contextualizing it within the UNICEF Mission' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinar.
- ✓ Read the booklet 'Legislation and Policies for Inclusive Education' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinar.
- ✓ Read the UNICEF Regional Teacher Training Package for the Europe and Central Asia Region (Introductory Module 'Linking Theory to Practice', Module 1 'Inclusive Education: Vision, Theory and Concepts', Module 2 'Working Together to Create Inclusive Schools' and Module 3 'Enabling Environments for Personalized Learning').
- ✓ Stay up to date with the work UNICEF does on [inclusive education](#).
- ✓ Get involved in the [Inclusive Education Initiative](#).

* In this guide, inclusive education is defined as per the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [General Comment No. 4](#) (para. 10).





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SECTION ONE

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

To ensure all children – especially children with disabilities, as well as children from other vulnerable populations – are able to access and participate in essential education and education-related services regardless of modality (in person, blended, or remote), governments must commit to equitable provision of services.

The following assumptions are essential to equitable, inclusive solutions:

1. Education systems have the responsibility to provide quality learning opportunities equitably to **all** students, particularly the most marginalized, such as learners with disabilities.
2. Regardless of the specific contexts and circumstances within which education systems operate, they will prioritize the development of conditions (such as capacity, resources, equipment, technology, curricula and others) that enable access and participation in mainstream, inclusive education for all students, particularly the **most vulnerable students**.
3. Findings from research indicate that **parents cannot and should not replace teachers** while children are accessing blended/remote learning. Ministries, municipal officials, school administrators and teachers remain responsible for providing adequate responses to **all** learners and tailoring instruction to each student, although parents/caregivers are critical partners in education.
4. **If governments determine it necessary to make provisions in a blended or remote modality, assumptions 1, 2 and 3 will guide planning.**
5. At the first available opportunity, ministries of education will **work in close collaboration with other relevant line ministries, government officials and civil society (including organizations of persons with disabilities [OPDs]) to establish coordination mechanisms at various levels.** This may include: national multisectoral coordination to address policy, referral pathways, capacity development, Internet connectivity and provision of devices, etc.; district-/municipal-/community-level multidisciplinary teams of professionals who can assess, plan for, implement and monitor education programmes that target the most vulnerable populations; and school-level teams comprising teachers, specialists and families to assess, plan and support individual students.



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SECTION TWO

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN BEFORE BLENDED/REMOTE LEARNING IS IMPLEMENTED

All education systems are responsible for providing education to all school-aged children. This is true whether education is being provided through traditional or non-traditional modalities. However, many difficulties that may be encountered while planning for blended or remote learning can be avoided by implementing a **few simple steps** well ahead of time.

2.1 Develop an inclusive education (or service) community

Inclusive education is an obligation of all governments that have signed/ratified the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#). It is also the mechanism by which all countries will reach [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#). According to the [CRPD's General Comment 4 \(GC4\)](#), inclusive education entails a transformation in culture, policy and practice; a commitment to removing barriers; and a strengthening of the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students without discrimination. It is a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies.

Governments must commit sufficient financial and human resources towards this goal.

According to the GC4, the core features of inclusive education are:

1. A **'whole systems'** approach: All resources are invested in advancing inclusive education, and toward introducing and embedding the necessary changes in institutional culture, policies and practices.
2. A **'whole educational environment'**: Culture, policies and practices are introduced and embedded in the educational environment at all levels.
3. A **'whole person'** approach: Recognition is given to the capacity of every person to learn and high expectations are established for all learners. Inclusive education offers flexible curricula and teaching and learning methods adapted to different strengths, requirements and learning styles. When planning teaching activities, the focus is on individualization, ensuring learners' capacities and aspirations, rather than on content.
4. **Supported teachers**: ALL teachers and other staff receive the education and training they need

to give them the core values and competencies to accommodate inclusive learning environments, including goal-setting and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), etc.

5. Respect for and value of **diversity**: All members of the learning community are equally welcome and must be shown respect for diversity.
6. A **learning-friendly environment**: Inclusive learning environments are accessible environments where everyone feels safe, supported (including through reasonable accommodations), stimulated and able to express themselves.
7. **Effective transitions**: Learners with disabilities receive support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education and, finally, to work (life-long focus).
8. Recognition of **partnerships**: The relationship between the learning environment, parents and caregivers, and the wider community must be recognized as a route towards inclusive societies.
9. **Monitoring the progress towards inclusive education**: This process must involve persons with disabilities.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

- ✓ Read the report *Inclusive Education: Understanding Article 24 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* ([full report](#) or [brief report](#)).
- ✓ Learn about the [2020 Global Education Monitoring Report](#) and its supporting documents.

FOR EXTENDED LEARNING:

- ✓ Free online course for school administrators on making schools more inclusive (based on legislation in the United States of America): <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/inc/challenge/#content>

2.2 Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS)

A strong and detailed EMIS will be an essential tool for planning and delivering blended or remote education. A properly set up and continually updated EMIS can, rapidly and remotely, provide teachers and administrators with essential information for planning, including data on number of students, number of teachers, number of teachers per classroom, etc.

The EMIS can also tell you how many children receive education-related services (for example, speech and language therapy), who provides the services, how often, and other relevant information. It can also indicate how many children with disabilities will need to receive remote service provision from special education teachers and therapists, and what their learning plans should focus on (based on their Individualized Education Plans). A reliable and detailed EMIS is an essential planning tool.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT EMIS:

- ✓ Read the booklet 'Education Management Information Systems and Children with Disabilities' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinar. New guidance is being developed by UNICEF.
- ✓ [Read about the disability-inclusive EMIS in Fiji.](#)

FOR EXTENDED LEARNING:

- ✓ Read the booklets 'Collecting Data on Child Disability' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and 'Mapping Children with Disabilities Out of School' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinars.

2.3 Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

All learners who have been identified as having a disability, a delay, or a related health condition that requires their learning pathways to be tailored to their specific strengths or needs, should have their learning planned out by the team of professionals responsible for providing education and services (such as teachers, the student themselves, the student’s family, relevant school staff and service providers, amongst others).

Thus, every IEP should contain: the current academic and/or functional abilities of the student; the expected goals (challenging and measurable) for the school year (or a given time frame); a description of educational services/supports provided to reach such goals; the assessment methods utilized to measure progress towards the expected goals;¹ and the person(s) responsible for implementation and monitoring.

The team responsible for the IEP should be composed of the same professionals responsible for ensuring its adequate implementation during blended or remote learning. When an IEP is created or modified, parental and/or student input and approval is required.

To facilitate the development of an IEP, use the acronym **SMART** to ensure all main components are included (see *Figure 1*).

IEPs are essential tools during all teaching and learning conditions; they are particularly important in blended, remote, or distance learning settings for school administrators, teachers, and learners and their families.

Research conducted during previous school closures indicates that children with disabilities are often left out of education provisions that do not follow a traditional model. Therefore, it is essential that children with disabilities have IEPs that can facilitate the planning of remote or blended teaching and services, and that can be used as guides for instruction. By using students’ (current) IEPs, schools ensure that children with disabilities are being provided with services, including information on by whom, how often and with what results.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IEPs:

- ✓ Read: [IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.](#)

2.4 Training

It is highly desirable that training and education for blended/remote learning and UDL take place before an eventual school closure occurs, ensuring both teachers, school personnel and students have the tools and time to build structures and routines for blended/remote learning, and facilitating the work of parents and caregivers.²

Importantly, if teachers, school personnel and students have not had an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills under ordinary circumstances, digital tools should not be used during blended/remote learning. Instead, priority should be given to those methods teachers and students are already familiar with and to which they have access.

FIGURE 1. SMART acronym





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SECTION THREE

BASIC CONCEPTS BEHIND REMOTE/ BLENDED LEARNING

3.1 What is remote (or blended) learning (or service) provision?

Remote learning is characterized by an unplanned physical separation between student and teacher as a consequence of an unforeseen situation such as an emergency. In this context – unlike in the context of distance learning or hybrid learning – the teaching-learning process (including materials and lesson plans) was not previously designed with physical separation in mind,³ nor did its design take into consideration the availability of resources in the home.

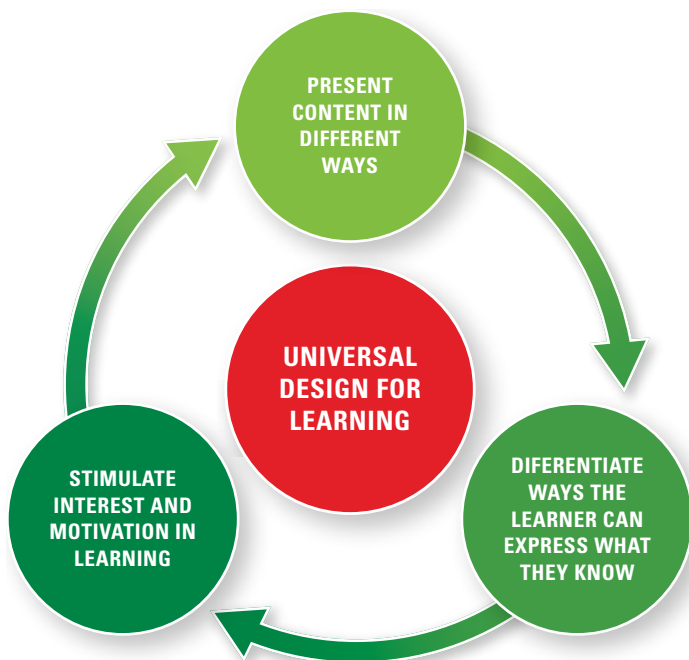
Remote or blended learning may include take-home printed materials, content delivered via radio or TV, and

online learning in a variety of formats; however, remote and blended learning require interaction with teachers, while distance learning does not.⁴ Regardless of the type of learning modality, it is essential that all resources be accessible to all students and that the planning and design of lessons and resources is done according to the principles of UDL.

3.1.1 WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)?

UDL is the *deliberate* design of instruction to meet the needs of a diverse mix of learners. It is *not* designed for one particular group of students (for example, children

FIGURE 2. Universal Design for Learning



with disabilities), but to address the learning needs of a wide-ranging group.⁵ The key concepts of UDL are presented in Figure 2.⁶

The access to quality, equitable and inclusive education is a right of *every child*⁷ and protected by legislation in many countries. UDL is a powerful tool to achieve this right, and is more cost-and time-effective in the long run than altering or adapting curricula, courses, or materials after they have been created.⁸

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT UDL:

- ✓ Read the booklet 'Access to School and the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning' (available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinar.
- ✓ Read about UNICEF's contribution to UDL [here](#).
- ✓ Explore the resources offered by the [Learning Designed](#) website (in English).

3.1.2 REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Many children with disabilities, especially those with complex and/or severe impairments, require and have the

right to reasonable accommodations to be able to participate in education on an equal basis with others. Reasonable accommodations must be reflected in the IEP when one exists. Fulfilling the agreements of an IEP is the obligation of all teachers. Furthermore, even when IEPs have not been developed, reasonable accommodations must be provided for all students who require them on the basis of their disabilities. While UDL may reduce the need for some accommodations, it will not eliminate the need for some students to receive additional specific accommodations (e.g., extra time for examinations, sign language interpreters, or differentiated materials).⁹ The provision of reasonable accommodations is not only stipulated by the CRPD,¹⁰ but is part of the education law of several countries.

According to the CRPD, reasonable accommodation means "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".¹¹

When it comes to education, this means teachers should develop a variety of methods to teach materials, test learning, and provide opportunities for all students to practice skills.¹² If a student has an IEP, a teacher needs to follow it, in addition to all other planning already done for the class.

3.1.3 SCHOOL-FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

Under all circumstances, schools must remain a support point for both students and families. During blended or remote learning, reinforcing this school-family relationship is vital to ensure community communication, assess and meet the needs of vulnerable students and families, and allow access to other services or agencies.¹³

For all families, but especially for children with disabilities, school closures can have significant repercussions, such as loss of income for caregivers working in school settings and heightened stress factors. While school closures can add unprecedented stress on parents and to family environments, necessitating that families mediate learning in circumstances usually unfamiliar to them, they may also be a unique opportunity to create new relationships.

There are many home-based practices that can help parents and children overcome the stress of school closures. Some of the most effective are also very simple to implement and their implementation can be suggested/guided by teachers, directors, or other school staff:

1. Create communication routines between the teacher/administrator and families that ensure clear and effective feedback is provided.
2. If the child has an IEP, ensure adequate modifications are made that take into consideration the remote or blended circumstances, as well as the family's available resources.
3. Try to keep a daily routine that is as similar as possible to the regular school-day routines, and guide parents in doing the same.
4. Parents may be guided in creating and maintaining a schedule that includes various types of activities (school-related, play, chores, etc.) to help them and their children navigate school closures.
5. Suggest that a dedicated space for school-related activities be designated within the house if possible. This can be an entirely separate room, if available, or simply a dedicated section of a room.
6. Provide families with information on parent support groups that can be a source for emotional support as well as tips on overcoming daily difficulties they may encounter.

Schools may also act as point of access to the promotion of positive home-based practices that teach families to

promote the education, safety, health and well-being of their children. Schools can raise awareness among families on how to best support and communicate with children with disabilities and on how to support home-based learning.¹⁴

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE HOME-BASED PRACTICES:

- ✓ Child to Child resources: [Resource Book](#) (with activities for multiple age groups and other specific modules) and [Stories for Health Education](#) (each story focuses on a different subject); UNICEF North Macedonia's [platform](#) for promoting emotional well-being in students and families.
- ✓ Guide created by therapists working at the Portuguese Resource Center for Inclusion to help parents of children with disabilities develop home-based activities ([Vol. 1](#) and [Vol. 2](#)); UNICEF Jamaica's list of [at-home learning activities for children with disabilities](#); Leonard Cheshire's [resource pack for supporting children with disabilities at home](#); UNICEF Parenting's [Mini Parenting Master Class](#) (in English).
- ✓ A parental guide for [Early Learning and Development](#) at home; UNICEF's [indoor play activities](#) for young children; [Internet of Good Things](#) with a robust section for parents and caregivers.
- ✓ To talk to children about COVID-19: Storybook from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on how kids can fight COVID-19 (translations may be available); guide from [Italian children's museums](#) for courageous kids (in Arabic and other languages); [tips from UNICEF](#) on how to comfort and protect children; the Parenting for Lifelong Health [COVID-19 Parenting page](#) (available in multiple languages); UNICEF's advice on helping children [deal with losses](#).



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SECTION FOUR

IF YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR A SCHOOL

Before diving into the ever-changing process of providing remote education, take a moment to consider your priorities. Schools serve much more than an educational purpose. Consider whether students, families and staff are supported in their basic needs (and what tools can be used otherwise) and place the emphasis of your action on the maintenance (or promotion) of safety, health, family support and the adequate socio-emotional condition of your community. Only when these are provided can education be effective.¹⁵ During an emergency,¹⁶ consider providing psychological support and teacher appreciation messages (e.g., via broadcast media).

4.1 Choosing/designing education provision

When designing for blended or remote learning, context must be carefully considered. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms were usually the first to be effectively rolled out, but with electricity, Internet and device requirements creating obstacles to many, this method of delivery is not always accessible. Therefore, **both high-tech and low-tech alternatives must be considered in order to reach ALL students.**¹⁷

Consulting with all teachers and staff, a school plan should be created on how blended or remote learning will look like daily and weekly, with timetables, tools, task division, etc. This plan will serve as the basis for teachers to organize and expand on their own class plans.¹⁸ Within the school, the utilized approaches should be unified (even as they allow for adaptability), allowing for collaboration among teachers and reducing the load on all parties (teachers, families and students).¹⁹ This will be of particular importance for:

- ✓ Teachers with multiple classes (e.g., subject teachers)
- ✓ Parents of multiple students
- ✓ Parents of students with multiple teachers
- ✓ Students with multiple teachers

Regardless of the platform(s) chosen, attention should be given to the inclusion of hard-to-reach students, and your planning should start by ensuring teaching and services

to your most vulnerable learners. This may mean paying attention to translation of materials to diverse mother tongues, providing close captioning or live local sign language interpretation, arranging for audio materials to be delivered, ensuring the materials are culturally appropriate and gender responsive, making sure materials are age-appropriate, and other considerations.²⁰ Following the principles of UDL, it would also be important to ensure that materials can adequately respond to the accessibility needs of each student.

4.1.1 REMOTE LEARNING DECISION TREE

The decision tree below (*see Figure 3*) can help you decide what type of blended or remote learning you should consider for your specific school population. This depends on the previous determination of the community's accessibility to resources,²¹ level of data literacy and parental support capacity. It is likely that a combination of methods and platforms could be used. However, you must remember not to place undue burden on families already coping with a stressful situation. Ultimately, you are responsible for reaching ALL your students. You may use the World Bank's checklist on an inclusive crisis response informed by UDL to check whether your chosen platforms or programmes are inclusive²² (*see Annex 1*).

4.1.2 SELF-INSTRUCTION MATERIALS

Self-instruction materials are those that do not depend on teacher-student communication, and include radio, TV, paper-based learning kits, and even some online platforms/applications (apps). Ideally, teacher guidance is recommended even when using materials that rely mostly on self-instruction. The learner/teacher connection is essential to maintaining a sense of community, and learning continuity is unlikely without it. However, well-designed self-learning material – delivered through TV or radio – can be effective, especially if they cover broader subjects, such as parent guidance, students' mental health, or lessons on well-being during an emergency.²³

4.1.3 PRINTED LEARNING KITS

In contexts in which only low- or no-tech methods are available, printed learning kits (which may include books,

worksheets, parent guidance information, etc.) are of particular importance. These tend to be those that most children will be familiar/comfortable with, but they must be carefully designed, as many children may receive little or no parental support. Depending on the age and literacy level of the student, highly visual materials may be recommended, and Braille versions should be made available.²⁴ Some examples of countries using paper-based materials are Jamaica, Jordan and Mauritania.²⁵

CASE STUDIES OF USAGE OF PRINTED LEARNING KITS:

- ✓ UNICEF Bangladesh: Pre-school home-based learning pack ([home education project reaches children in remote parts of Bangladesh](#))
- ✓ UNICEF Bhutan: Self-instructional materials, including a version for children with special educational needs ([reaching the unreached](#))
- ✓ UNICEF Jamaica: Learning kits for children 0–6 years old ([learning kits for children in communities affected by quarantine](#))

LOW-TECH AND NO-TECH MODALITIES:

- ✓ UNICEF guidance: [Guidance on distance learning modalities](#)

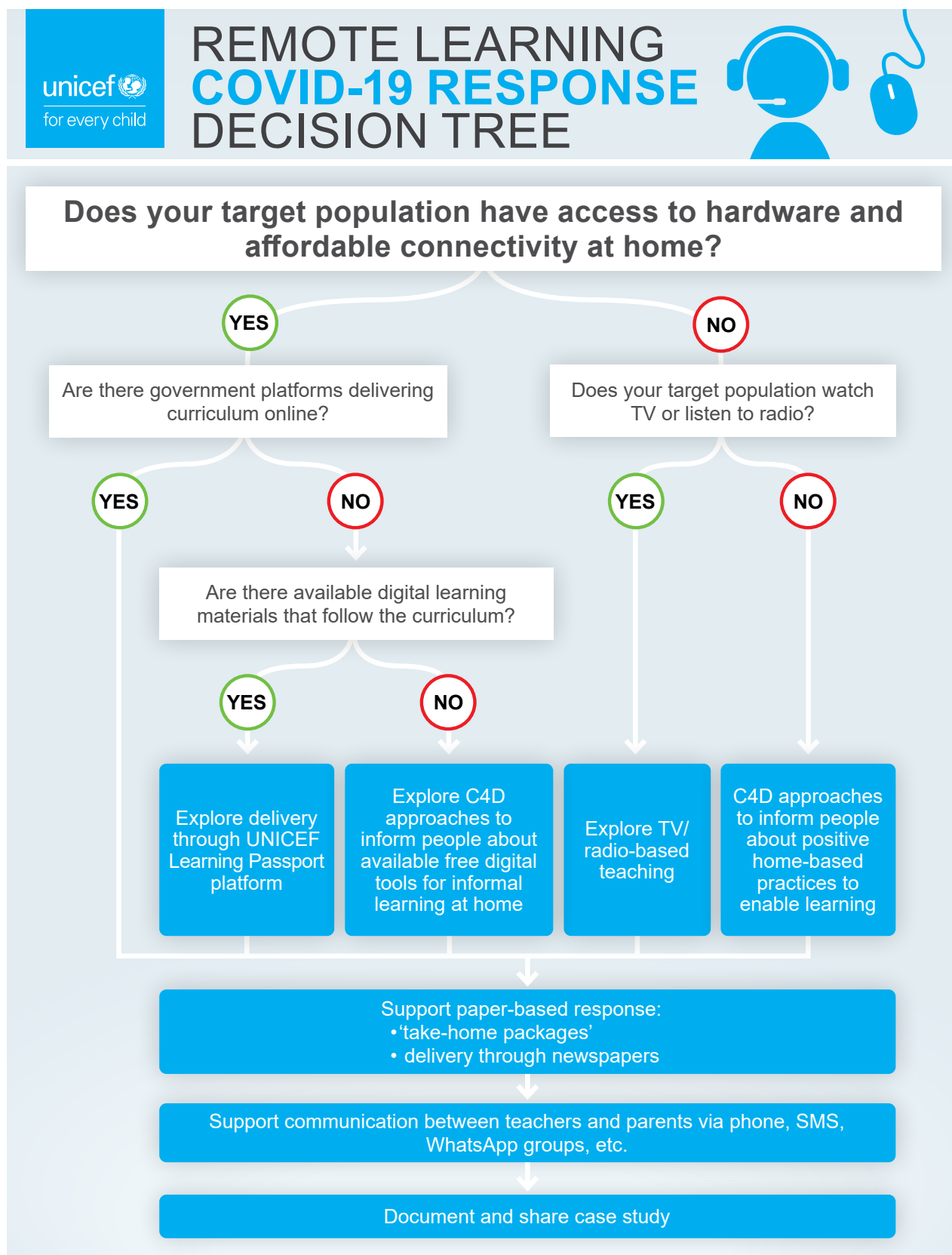
4.1.4 RADIO AND TV

Radio or TV broadcast of educational materials may be used in contexts/countries where Internet connectivity or hardware accessibility is low, to ensure all students have access to education (even when Internet connectivity and hardware are available) and to diversify the means of access to information.

Some examples of countries with TV-based learning are Mexico, Mongolia,²⁶ Montenegro, Morocco, and Uzbekistan²⁷ with Morocco and Uzbekistan providing sign language interpretation in their TV classes. TV-based learning can also be provided via the Internet (e.g., in Mongolia) for students who may not be able to tune in at the scheduled time or who want to repeat sessions.

In places where electricity connection is unstable, solar- or battery-powered radios are a solution to reaching students. Radios also tend to be portable, allowing

FIGURE 3. Remote learning decision tree²⁸



In most contexts, multiple approaches are needed to reach the target population through a variety of means.

students to listen in to lessons while tending to other family members or doing chores. Some examples of countries with radio-based learning are Burkina Faso, Burundi, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Madagascar²⁹ and Somalia.

Despite their ease of use and reach, both radio- and TV-based blended or remote learning should be carefully monitored and accompanied by teacher involvement, whether through paper-based assessment, establishment of a phone line for students to ask questions, SMS-based quizzes, or other teacher-led methods of instruction.

CASE STUDIES OF RADIO AND TV INSTRUCTION:

- ✓ Uzbekistan: **A timely response on learning during school closures**
- ✓ Mongolia: **Web platform**

4.1.5 ONLINE PLATFORMS

Many countries have created online platforms to enable student learning, be it by providing further access to televised content (e.g., Mongolia) or by providing curriculum-based materials that teachers may use or adapt in their classes. However, the use of online platforms must be preceded by educating children (and teachers) about online safety. As previously mentioned,

the use of online platforms requires previous experience and digital literacy, and it is not recommended in circumstances where children have not already been exposed to online learning in school.

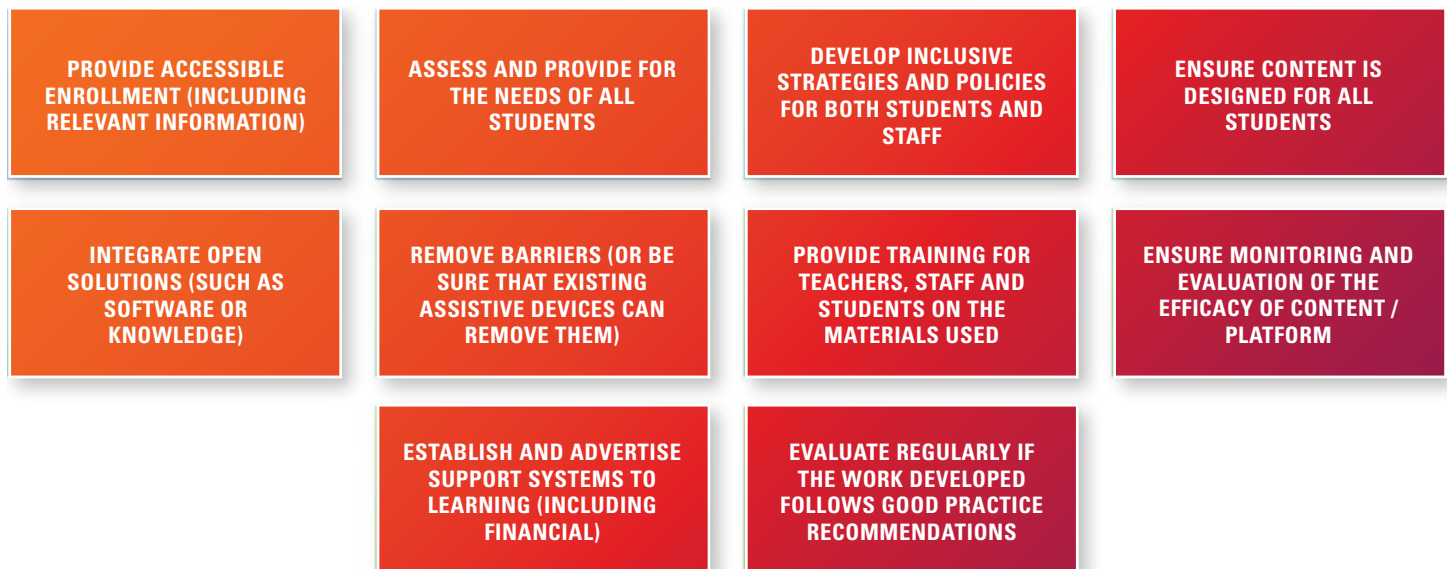
EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENTAL ONLINE PLATFORMS:

- ✓ Argentina: **Seguimos educando**
- ✓ End Violence Against Children online safety information: **Safe to Learn**

A set of guidelines was created by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to help those responsible for an educational institution to make decisions related to content and platforms used in open and distance Learning.³⁰ These guidelines are described in Figure 4 and similar guidelines for teachers can be found in section 5.2 ‘Design learning for equity and access’. For more detailed information, please consult the manual and the related matrix of actions for educational delivery.

In addition to these guidelines, specific tips to ensure accessibility of your platform/content may be found in the article by **Brokop (2008)**, such as which fonts to use, how to ensure screen-reader compatibility, or how to organize platform layout to account for students with low mobility.

FIGURE 4. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) guidelines for educational institutions³¹



UNICEF and Microsoft Corporation are also planning to roll out the Learning Passport platform to over 20 countries in 2021. The Learning Passport incorporates many of Microsoft's accessibility technologies via its integrations into Teams, where connectivity permits, and offers accessible content to learners. Some countries, like Timor-Leste, have used the Learning Passport with a focus on accessible content.

UNICEF also has an extensive collection of resources related to accessibility ([ABCs of digital accessibility](#)). As mentioned previously, ensuring that the learning process and materials are accessible to children with disabilities is imperative to ensuring their success. Moreover, accessibility considerations are a principle of UDL and can contribute to the success of all students by catering to each child's learning style.

4.2 Providing training

4.2.1 ON REMOTE EDUCATION/SERVICE PROVISION

Every educational institution should ensure that training on the chosen remote or blended learning platform(s) is made available to teachers, so that they can better support students and their families in their engagement with the learning platforms.³² When possible, tutoring by teachers who are more proficient in the tools used may be a solution to providing quick and inexpensive training opportunities, as well as form a basis for further collaboration in the adaptation and improvement of the whole process.³³

In some countries, governments may create guidelines that are broad (e.g., recommendations from Washington State in the United States on [Continuous Learning for 2020](#)) or specific (e.g., [Portuguese good practices guide for the remote emergency learning of deaf students](#)), to aid schools and teachers in adapting to blended or remote education. Use these as a basis on which to base and expand your training plan.

4.2.2 ON THE ADAPTABILITY OF THE SYSTEM AND UDL

In an emergency situation, training must primarily focus on the methods and systems chosen to provide remote or blended education to your students, as well as on their adaptability. Nonetheless, opportunities to explore the broader concept of UDL should be made available to the teachers and staff in your institution as soon as possible.

The resources mentioned below may be useful to assist you in the design of a basic, simple and quick introduction for all teachers to start learning and practicing UDL in your current context. It is advised that, after the first round of training, teachers be assessed on their further training needs and sessions planned in response (e.g., a specific lesson on how UDL can help students with sensory disabilities).

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT UDL:

- ✓ Read the booklet 'Access to School and the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning' ([Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#) and [Spanish](#)) and watch the companion webinar.
- ✓ Explore the resources offered by the [Learning Designed](#) website (in English), on both general and specific topics related to UDL.

4.3 Monitoring results

Monitoring of blended or remote learning should take into account input from the students, families, teachers and other related staff. It is useful for determining which population groups/areas are not accessing education; assessing the quality and effectiveness of remote learning modalities, learning and well-being amongst students;³⁴ and informing possible further school closures (see *chapter 6: Returning to school, better!*).



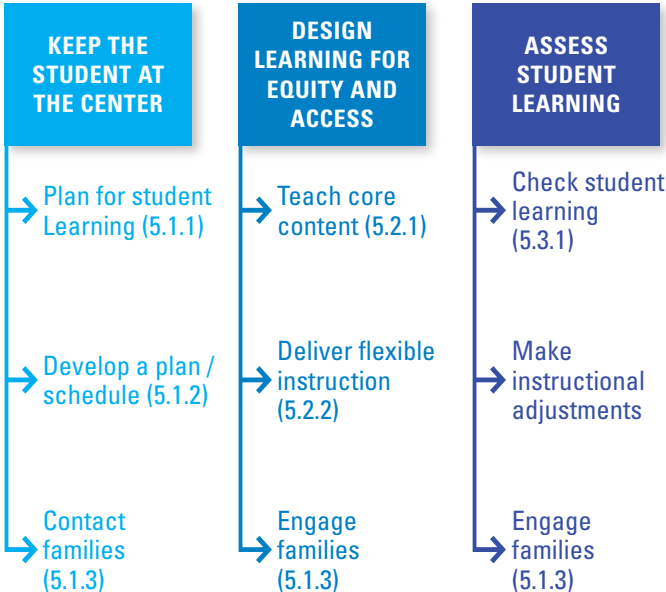
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SECTION FIVE

IF YOU ARE A TEACHER/SERVICE PROVIDER

During blended or remote learning, these are the essential steps teachers must take:³⁵

FIGURE 5. Basics of remote emergency education



The sections below will focus on each step in more detail.

5.1 Keep the student at the centre

5.1.1 PLAN FOR STUDENT LEARNING

In blended or remote learning, just as in normal situations, your plans should have effective student learning at their core. Consider your students’ personal situations, access to resources, baseline, and the learning goals you want to achieve for both the class and each individual student, and plan accordingly. Utilize the three key concepts of UDL (see section 3.1.1: ‘What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?’) to ensure your instruction meets the needs of all your students. Be prepared to adapt these initial plans to address student strengths and needs (see section 5.3.1: ‘Check student learning’). During or after an emergency, consider that your context, as well as that of your students, will likely face several changes that you will need to account for.

5.1.2 DEVELOP A PLAN/SCHEDULE

The continuity of communication or interaction with teachers during school closure is important to ensure the continuity of learning in blended or remote modes. This gives both students and teachers a sense of normality and routine, and acts as a facilitator to the eventual return to school full-time.³⁶ A clear plan or schedule helps both students and families navigate routines and expectations, maintaining a sense of normalcy and promoting student learning.

Developing your plan and schedule with fellow teachers/school directors will ensure a coherent workday for you and your students, as well as provide adequate workloads for all parties involved.

5.1.3 CONTACT AND ENGAGE FAMILIES

For families, the added role in supporting education during blended or remote learning may be hard to adapt to. Parents and caregivers will find themselves (unexpectedly) playing a more active part in their child’s learning, and should have information to match this added role. Teachers should clearly communicate the educational plan – for example, with a simple checklist parents can follow (the *What* is being done), and provide a suggested routine/schedule (the *When* is being done).³⁷ Some tips for an initial effective communication can be found in Figure 6.³⁸

Communication between teachers and families should take into consideration the educational level of the parent (e.g., whether written communications are suitable, or

phone communication is needed) and should support uptake of the chosen remote learning modalities. Teachers play an important role in raising awareness of available learning programmes, reassuring parents of the reliability of materials provided, and reinforcing parents’ role as learning supporters for their children.³⁹ Fundamentally, the method of communication must be one that is comfortable and familiar for students and their parents; this is highly dependent on context.⁴⁰

COMMUNICATION EXAMPLE:

✓ Script for an initial phone call with the family

5.2 Design learning for equity and access

When considering the overall accessibility of your educational materials, explore content available from the [National Center on Accessible Education Materials](#) in the United States to learn more about the basics of accessibility and how to use accessible education materials for remote learning. UDL guidelines (*see section 3.1.1: ‘What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?’*) will also help you design and deliver education in an equitable and flexible way, so that every student can learn.

UNESCO created a set of guidelines to help teachers and instructors navigate and adapt to Open and Distance Learning (ODL);⁴¹ these can be found in Figure 7 (guidelines for educational institutions can be found

FIGURE 6. Tips for initial effective communication

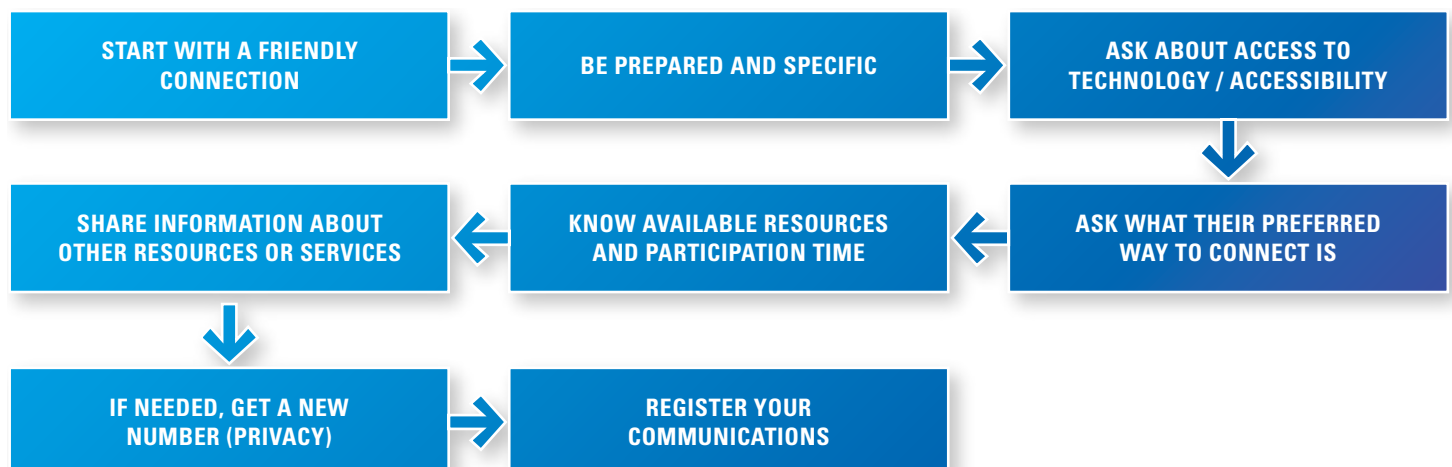
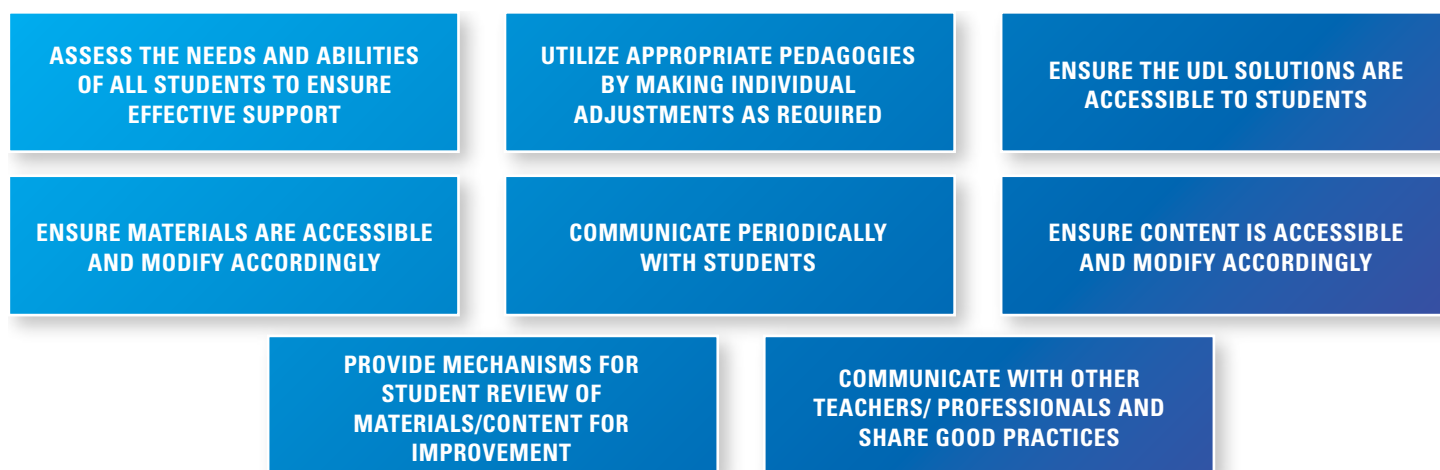


FIGURE 7. ODL guidelines for teachers/instructors⁴²



in *section 4.1.5: 'Online platforms'*). For more detailed information, please consult the manual and the related matrix of actions for educational delivery.

In addition to these guidelines, specific tips to ensure accessibility of classes/materials provided may be found in [Brokop \(2008\)](#), such as which fonts to use, how to ensure screen-reader compatibility, or how to assess participation.

Should you need to choose a conferencing app or service to communicate with your students, attention needs to be given to the accessibility of each service. The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development created an [overview](#) that may help you choose the right app/service for your students.⁴³

If your students have IEPs (*see section 2.3: 'Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)'*), consider applying best practices [summarized](#) from survey answers from 90 teachers in the United States.⁴⁴

5.2.1 TEACH CORE CONTENT

Education, like other service provision, should focus on basic human needs. While it may be tempting to follow the original plans and workloads, consider that blended or remote learning presents many new challenges to all those involved, and likely more than is the case with traditional teaching. Together with your school director or fellow teachers, identify the core content to be taught in the present school year, semester, or even month.

Plan to ensure core content is learned by every student, to reduce knowledge gaps and allow for a smoother return to school (*see chapter 6: Returning to school, better!*). Additional content should also be provided for more curious/advanced students, to challenge and motivate them.

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS FOR CONTENT:

- ✓ [BrainPop](#) and [BrainPop Educator's version](#) (with lesson planning tools) explain basic concepts with multiple resources and ways of assessment.
- ✓ The [Child to Child resource book](#) can be adapted or used as a guide for a wide range of topics related to children (such as education, health, nutrition, etc.).
- ✓ [Rumie LearnCloud](#) allows teachers to organize and upload content into playlists, which can be downloaded for offline access; it includes a wide range of topics and languages.
- ✓ The [Aga Khan Foundation](#) Blended Learning Initiative has courses that may be searched by topic and/or language on their website.
- ✓ [Discovery Education](#) with the Egyptian Knowledge Bank gives access to Egyptian students with IDs and open access with an Egyptian IP for students without IDs.
- ✓ UNICEF Jamaica has a [compilation](#) of educational resources for at-home learning.
- ✓ [Amazon](#) offers a free collection of audio stories.

5.2.2 DELIVER FLEXIBLE INSTRUCTION

Setting up guidelines and structuring a timetable for education provision with your students is vital, but so is flexibility, as some of your students may be unable to follow them. Providing students with choices over how to approach their daily tasks, demonstrate their learning and communicate (the three key concepts of UDL) is important, once the daily structure and methods for communication have been chosen.⁴⁵ The way you apply these concepts in your practice will depend on the strengths of both you and your students, and on the overall context in which the teaching-learning process is taking place. Here are some ideas that may inspire you:

1. Present content in different ways: use the VARK (visual, aural, reading/writing, kinesthetic) acronym to help you add variety to how information is presented:⁴⁶
 - a. Combine a verbal explanation with a hands-on exercise (aural + kinesthetic).
 - b. While showing a video, make sure captions or transcripts are provided (visual + aural + reading/writing).
 - c. Read questions/texts aloud when you deliver writing exercises (aural + reading/writing).
 - d. Provide a diagram or picture to help guide a hands-on exercise (visual + kinesthetic).
2. Differentiate ways the learner can express what they know – encourage your students to take control of their own learning:
 - a. Allow students to answer questions verbally or in writing.
 - b. Give plenty of time during assessments for students to think, and allow the usage of tools (e.g., dictionary, calculator, manipulatives) that do not interfere with the concept being assessed.
 - c. While solving exercises or doing project-based assignments, consider allowing students to choose whether to work alone, in pairs, or in groups.

- d. Consider what concept you are evaluating and the different ways it can be expressed – for example, ‘constructing an argument’ can be evaluated through debates, essays, theatrical representations, PowerPoint presentations, web page creation, interviews, and so on.⁴⁷

3. Stimulate interest and motivation in learning – create bridges between the concepts you teach and the life of your students; use their interests to explore difficult concepts and keep the difficulty levels high but manageable, to maintain interest:
 - a. Base problem-solving exercises on your context – students living in rural or urban areas face different kinds of problems. For example, when learning how to calculate area, rural students may relate more to calculating the size of a gardening plot while urban students may relate more to calculating the size of a bicycle parking area. If you can use real-life examples in your school or community, use them.
 - b. Some concepts can be taught by using different methods, such as allowing your students to practise reading by choosing their own texts and then presenting their learning to the class. This limits fatigue and sparks interest in reading.
 - c. The ‘sweet spot’ for learning presents itself when tasks are hard but manageable. This is an ever-evolving area and varies between students, concepts and subjects. Organizing exercises by level of difficulty, in a given class, subject, or concept, will allow you to quickly attribute harder or easier exercises to your students depending on their level of mastery and motivation. Managing difficulty levels will allow your students to learn the concept and gain mastery of it without feeling bored or incompetent.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT VARK:

- ✓ Consult their [website](#) and take the [VARK test](#) to find out more about your learning style(s).

5.3 Assess student learning

5.3.1 CHECK STUDENT LEARNING

Monitoring learning is important not only for each student but also to check how the class as a whole is adapting to traditional, blended, or remote learning.⁴⁸ Depending on the context, monitoring and assessment may present very different degrees of difficulty. In contexts where online learning and assessment are possible, teachers may need to consider student access to information or to parental assistance during an assessment.⁴⁹

One possible strategy is using performance-based assessments, whereby students are allowed to rehearse skills, consult resources, gather and utilize feedback to inform their final performance/product – this can be a report, learning log, collaborative project, project portfolio, case study, multimedia product, etc.⁵⁰

Despite being more limited during remote learning, formative assessment is particularly important during this time, especially if self-instruction materials are used

(such as TV or radio broadcasts) and should take place daily or, at minimum, two to three times per week (e.g., through SMS-based quizzes). Formative assessment allows teachers to monitor, support and adapt to their students' abilities and needs during remote learning, and for the student to be informed of their progress. In addition, it informs school reopening, allowing for targeted accelerated learning or remedial education to address identified learning gaps.⁵¹

5.3.2 MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS

Based on your assessments, revert back to the steps suggested in *section 5.1.1: 'Plan for student learning'*: Reassess your students' baseline, the new goals you want them to achieve, and plan according to their needs, interests and abilities. Explore new ways of presenting concepts, utilize students' interests and give them options to demonstrate their learning. If needed, arrange with your colleagues and with the family for extra support measures to be rolled out. This continuous evaluation and adjustment of instruction is the foundation of inclusive service provision before, during and after an emergency situation.



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SECTION SIX

RETURNING TO SCHOOL, BETTER!

The long pause forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic led to deep reflections on what school systems could do better. Numerous discussions have occurred around the globe to determine what better school systems could look like, both for the education of children with disabilities, but also to ensure inclusion and equity. Organizations like [UNICEF](#), [UNESCO](#), [Global Partnership for Education](#), [World Bank](#), [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies](#) and others all agree that returning to school must entail preparation for other unforeseen events.

Therefore, whether you are a service provider or responsible for a school, it is vital that during remote/blended schooling you take action to include children with disabilities that can inform their immediate and

safe return as soon as conditions are adequate. Key recommendations to this end are:

- ✓ Maintain meaningful consultations/collaboration with families of children with disabilities, persons with disabilities and OPDs.
- ✓ Use the best available data on children with disabilities for planning, budgeting and outreach, and include disability-specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation.
- ✓ Disaggregate all data by disability.
- ✓ Apply a multisectoral approach.
- ✓ Widely disseminate materials in multiple accessible formats.⁵²

6.1 Educational services

To build back better and ensure an inclusive recovery of the educational system, the World Bank recommends the steps below, also endorsed by other organizations:

- ✓ Design/promote an inclusive re-enrollment/back-to-school campaign, including the promotion of enrolment of children with disabilities, remedial courses, 'catch-up' classes, tutoring and accelerated curriculum delivery.
- ✓ Provide training on psychosocial support for learners, on the technological interfaces used at school, on curriculum adjustments and on techno-pedagogical skills.
- ✓ Provide guidance on identifying learning loss among students.
- ✓ Develop robust online training programmes to support both pre- and in-service certified teacher professional development activities. Radio and TV programming can also be used to build the skills of teachers to deliver remote learning.
- ✓ Mentor teachers in supporting the inclusion of learners with disabilities into their classrooms.

- ✓ Curate high-quality teaching and learning materials, as well as training materials.
- ✓ Raise parental awareness of the importance of education for children with disabilities.
- ✓ Utilize school-level data to ensure information about learners with disabilities is being captured effectively.⁵³

If your school relied on digital means to provide blended or remote learning, or is planning to do so during future school closures, usage of the European Union's Digital Competence Frameworks can help pinpoint the level of digital competence of your organization/school (**DigCompOrg**) and your teachers (**DigCompEdu**), as well as provide a framework for their improvement. The free **SELFIE** tool can be used to anonymously gather multilevel information on your organization's alignment within the Framework.⁵⁴

Safety and health are also especially vital during pandemic/disease emergencies, since schools often reopen before surges are completely controlled. The IASC checklist

FIGURE 8. Checklist for school administrators, teachers and staff for prevention of COVID-19 in schools⁵⁵

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. WORK WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HEALTH OFFICIALS TO ENSURE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE NOT USED AS HEALTH TREATMENT OR QUARANTINE CENTERS, AS SHELTERS OR FOR ANY OTHER NON-EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES, EVEN ON A TEMPORARY BASIS
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. PROMOTE AND DEMONSTRATE REGULAR HAND WASHING AND POSITIVE HYGIENE BEHAVIORS AND MONITOR THEIR UPTAKE. ENSURE ADEQUATE, CLEAN AND SEPARATE TOILETS FOR GIRLS AND BOYS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure soap and safe water is available at age-appropriate hand washing stations ✓ Encourage frequent and thorough washing (at least 20 seconds) ✓ Place hand sanitizers in toilets, classrooms, halls, and near exits where possible ✓ Ensure adequate, clean and separate toilets or latrines for girls and boys that are within a safe distance ✓ Post signs encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. CLEAN AND DISINFECT SCHOOL BUILDINGS, CLASSROOMS AND ESPECIALLY WATER AND SANITATION FACILITIES AT LEAST ONCE A DAY, PARTICULARLY SURFACES THAT ARE TOUCHED BY MANY PEOPLE (RAILINGS, LUNCH TABLES, SPORTS EQUIPMENT, DOOR AND WINDOW HANDLES, TOYS, TEACHING AND LEARNING AIDS ETC.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent 5000ppm) for disinfecting surfaces and 70% ethyl alcohol for disinfection of small items, and ensure appropriate equipment for cleaning staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. INCREASE AIR FLOW AND VENTILATION WHERE CLIMATE ALLOWS (OPEN WINDOWS, USE AIR CONDITIONING WHERE AVAILABLE, ETC.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. ENSURE SAFE PREPARATION AND (WHERE APPLICABLE) SERVICE OF FOOD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enforce frequent handwashing for all cooks, food handlers, cashiers and other food service personnel ✓ Sanitize cookware, plates, cups and cutlery regularly and plan for distribution that minimizes handling ✓ Stagger meal times to diminish crowds and allow time for cleaning and disinfecting between shifts
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. ENSURE TRASH IS REMOVED DAILY AND DISPOSED OF SAFELY

depicted in Figure 8 can help guide the actions of all school personnel to ensure a safe return to school.

In addition, retrofit existing facilities to enable access, and implement accessibility standards for new construction.⁵⁶

6.2 Support services

As mentioned throughout this guide, inclusive education is only possible when support services are in place. Thus, inclusive education is highly dependent on health and social services supporting re-entry, retention, or first-time enrolment in education. While there is little reliable research related to the long-term consequences of prolonged school closures on enrolment and learning, there is enough evidence to indicate that children with disabilities and children from other vulnerable populations might require additional and intentional supports to return to (and stay in) school.

Once ‘back-to-school’ activities start being developed, school systems should ensure that:

- ✓ Children with disabilities or delays have access to health officials who can assess and address their physical and psychological well-being, ensuring a health-education referral pathway that aims to include the child or youth in the education system as soon as possible.
- ✓ Children with disabilities or delays have access to social services officials that can create a referral network for education support services; these support

services should include assessment of needs related to reasonable accommodation, assistive technology and accessibility in general – both at school and at home – as well as consideration of family wrap-around services that are specific to addressing their lived experiences during the school closures.

- ✓ School-level partnerships between schools, parent organizations, community officials, health and social protection officials and nongovernmental organizations/OPDs can help to identify children with a delay or disability who have dropped out or never attended school, and initiate a process of assessment/identification of barriers to school access and participation.
- ✓ Create community-based teams that can ensure all children with disabilities or delays who were previously in school have, in fact, returned to school and are able to access necessary services for retention; this might mean that a referral to social services is made to consider the need for cash transfers to be provided to children with disabilities and their families to cover their needs.
- ✓ Ensure that all children who have returned to school are able to participate and be successful in their daily school life.
- ✓ Revise IEPs of children with disabilities, regardless of their expiration date, and ensure an adequate baseline formative assessment is leading to adequate goals and objectives.



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ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Questions for Inclusive Crisis Response, Informed by Universal Design for Learning (The World Bank, 2020)⁵⁷

ACTION STEPS AND UDL PRINCIPLES	IS THIS HAPPENING? YES/NO (if no, provide information on inputs or changes needed)
CHOOSING A REMOTE EDUCATION PROGRAM	
Can the intervention deliver information to students on a mass scale in an environment other than a typical school set-up?	
Can students meaningfully respond to the information they have been provided?	
Is there any way for children to engage with material in an out-of-school setting (with caregivers, siblings, or safely with nearby children)?	
COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY	
Do caregivers have capacity to act as educational providers?	
Do communities have technological capacity for suggested intervention?	
If materials are needed, are procurement timelines feasible for rapid startup?	
EDUCATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY AND UDL	
Can ALL children receive material the way it is delivered?	
Can ALL children meaningfully respond to material?	
Are children’s communication needs considered so ALL children can engage with lessons/material?	
Is there flexibility in timing in how students can engage with material?	
INDIVIDUALIZATION	
Can the program as it is currently constructed be modified for an individual’s specific access needs and reasonable accommodations?	
Can the program be modified in difficulty level to allow for access of a greater number of children with disabilities?	

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