

**Ministerium für
Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern**



- Die Ministerin -

To all parents
whose children attend a school
in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

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Schwerin, 3. April 2020

Dear parents,

The first three weeks in this new situation which has been an exceptional one for all of us, are now behind us. You will certainly have been doing a lot of organising, and tried to perform the “balancing act” between childcare, professional life and private obligations, which is certainly no easy task.

We understand this difficult situation very well, and how during it you want to meet the needs of both your children and those of others. The school closures were a drastic measure, but they were, and continue to be, regrettably, necessary, to make it possible to curb the spread of the deadly coronavirus. With this, we would first like to offer our sincere thanks for your understanding, your commitment and your perseverance.

For many children and parents, learning at home is a major challenge as far as learning content is concerned – teachers are expected to provide the content either digitally or in hard copy. The objective is to get students to consolidate what they have been taught in school as well as possible during the school closures period and keep their learning progress assured. We hear that this works very well in many places, and that teachers develop learning materials for their children in a home environment with much energy and creativity. However, it is also not always easy, and some spend long hours in front of a computer or a tablet – dear parents, please don't get yourselves overwhelmed in this situation: you're not expected to play the role of a substitute teacher. Your children's teachers also know this.

Your children will – depending on their age – become increasingly aware of how different everyday life looks at the moment. They will certainly be asking you many questions, and looking forward to your suggestions as to how they can spend this no-school time.

We would like to give you some suggestions on the way – especially for the Easter holidays. Perhaps you would like to seize upon one or another of these pointers:

1) **Child-friendly attempts at explanation as well as answer suggestions to your children's questions (annexes 1 and 2)**

These are intended as an aid to help you deal with the coronavirus, and also regarding mediation with your children. All these considerations can be associated with the motto "keep calm".

2) **Practical suggestions for time at home (annex 3)**

3) **Learning at home – digital lessons (annex 4)**

4) **Assessments during the school closures period (annex 5)**

We are also asked many questions regarding performance evaluation in connection with learning in a home environment. For this reason, we have created a guide on this for you, which explains in detail how schools do it.

Of course, you are the one who ultimately decides what your children are to experience, and how you will organise their day. You can of course expect to exchange ideas with other parents, including over the telephone or via social media. In this way you can pass on the best ideas and benefit from each other. If you require more help, please turn to one of the various **hotlines and websites (annex 6)**.

Everyone who plays a role in a school is familiar with the difficult task of having to ensure that students will not suffer any long-term handicaps as a result of the crisis situation. We are committed to this goal together.

The current situation means major challenges for all of us. Only together will we be able to overcome them. With our full recognition of this hardship, we wish you all the best and, naturally, more than everything else, health for you and your family. And: in spite of everything, Happy Easter!

Yours faithfully,



Bettina Martin
Ministerin für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur M-V
(Minister for Education, Science and Culture of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)



Kay Czerwinski
Vorsitzender des Landeselternrates M-V
(Chairperson of the State Parents Council of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)

Child-friendly attempts at explanation

How do parents explain the coronavirus crisis to their children?

The coronavirus crisis can weigh on children as well as adults, and lead to uncertainty (Federal government information). Possible consequences include: loss of appetite and concentration, changes in sleeping patterns, and tired and even irritated responses. Parents should be there for their children. Often it is a big help simply for a trusted caregiver to be in the vicinity. Parents should discuss the current situation with their children, listen attentively and also be patient if a child repeatedly voices their own feelings.

It is recommended that you provide your child with age-appropriate facts and information. This also includes being honest: mothers and fathers should explain to their children why they can't see their friends or grandparents. Also, questions asked by a child should be answered honestly – even if no-one knows the answer. Parents should also be able to say, wholly openly: "I don't know that." If parents are stressed or concerned, they should not conceal their own consternation, but rather speak about it openly – without being overly pessimistic. This will help a child to understand why everyone is responding to everything so apprehensively.

Avoid disturbing reporting.

The current coverage about the coronavirus is enough to disturb adults. Even when children / youths themselves will be directly affected by school closures, quarantine measures or cases of illness within their circle of acquaintances, an objective clarification is important.

Parents should make use of age-appropriate sources of information on the Internet or on TV, and avoid directly conveying their own fears to their children. In the case of younger children, it is recommendable to make use of child-friendly formats together with a child's parents, which will explain the current situation in an age-appropriate way.

But how do I deal with my child's many questions?

Small children/pre-school children will require help understanding the changing everyday life. For this reason, it is important to explain exactly why the day care centre has closed; why right now washing hands is more important than usual; and why, for now, they are unable to visit grandma and grandad, or friends. Children this age can develop fears that they or their parents are becoming seriously ill. They are especially afraid of losing their parents or being separated from them. They want to know that their parents are doing everything to protect them, and themselves.

Children of school age will understand that major efforts are being undertaken to impede the spread of the virus, and that doctors are working on a vaccine. They are also more aware of the extent of the current pandemic. This can trigger fears about the well-being of their family. Children should understand that the current situation has nothing to do with blame and punishment. They haven't done anything wrong. Children will also ask why their own school was closed, or what will happen if someone close to them contracts the virus, and they will want responsibilities clarified. Parents can, in particular, turn to child-friendly sources of information in this regard e.g. that programme with the mouse, or logo-based children's stories.

With teenagers, conditions like quarantine or cancellation of events amount to a special kind of restriction. This can trigger a feeling of injustice in them. In this context, parents should try to cultivate an understanding of the situation, and point out that the current restrictions affect everyone, regardless of their age.

Response suggestions to children's questions

Why are schools remaining closed?

In the case of schools in particular, many people get together every day, and could easily infect each other. If all schools are closed for a while, that could make it easier to curb the spread of the virus. For politicians of Germany's various States, the decision to close schools was no easy one. But it was a necessary one.

Why can I not do training or go to the music school?

Not too many people can become sick at the same time. There aren't that many beds in hospitals or that many doctors, nurses and carers around to help as many as possible get well again. In order to avoid infecting others and vice versa, many people are staying at home – this means that children as well must stay at home. This is the only way to prevent more people from becoming ill at once than can be treated in hospitals.

Why can I not meet my friends?

Since there is usually no sign of an illness in the first days of being infected, one should keep away from other people. In the case of children, this means protecting themselves and their friends from infection. It should be explained to children that, at this time, keeping distance is the best expression of affection and care.

Why are some children allowed to go to school?

When schools close, many parents need to stay at home, and they will be absent from work. This is especially bad if one's parents have jobs e.g. at a hospital, in the care sector or in other especially important occupations with tasks related to ensuring / maintaining public security and order or other public services. For this reason, childcare places have been provided for children of such parents in schools.

Are children at risk?

Children do not belong to the known risk group for a coronavirus disease. With infected children, the illness is normally mild. It may even be the case that they show no symptoms. Nevertheless, they could spread the virus, and for this reason they must also live with the current restrictions. But take note that serious cases can develop with children and youths as well.

Can we still visit relatives?

In the case of relatives, the same behavioural guidelines as for all others apply. It is best to avoid family visits or limit them to what is absolutely necessary. Right now, the oldest family members should not be visited, because they belong to one of the main risk groups. It may be the case that children carry the virus even if they show no symptoms. Telephone contact is always possible.

But isn't Corona just like the flu?

1. No. The coronavirus is considerably more contagious than the flu.
2. There is a long phase during which there remains no symptoms, but the virus spreads especially aggressively. In addition, at this time there is no vaccine or effective medicaments. In order that everyone who requires intensive treatment can receive help in a hospital, we must all (collectively) work together to ensure that not too many people become ill at the same time.

How can one get infected?

The virus is transmitted from person to person in particular. For example, this can happen if an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. This allows viruses to be spread in the air, meaning that another person could breathe them in. But viruses can also be passed on via hands. After someone has been infected, it can take up to two weeks for them to become ill. Even during this period (before one feels really sick), it can be contagious.

So what can one ultimately do against it?

Hygiene regulations need to be followed. The most important one is regular and thorough hand washing. One should keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres from others. In the event of any signs of disease – in particular, fever and dry coughing – you must stay at home. Parents will call the family doctor.

Practical suggestions for time at home

- Plan a daily and weekly structure together; write this down and make solid arrangements for getting up, and mealtimes, and if appropriate for school work, playtime and proper rest at night. The structure does not need to match that of your child's school. So you can be sure of ensuring for your child conditions of stability, predictability and a feeling of everyday life.
- Read books together, and discuss the read content with your child.
- Take extended walks in nature – perhaps also ones with specific themes e.g. “geometric shapes” or “early bloomers”.
- Go on a joint bike tour.
- Do cooking or baking together. During this you can discuss topics like healthy nutrition or eating habits.
- Share handicraft techniques with your children. With this, small gifts can also be made for different occasions.
- Set some time aside for board or card games (e.g. Uno, Elfer raus, 6 nimmt, Vier gewinnt etc.), dice games, letter games like Scrabble and writing games like “Stadt, Land, Fluss”.
- Create a photo album together (analogue or digital), thus allowing you to capture memories of past holidays and more beautiful moments.
- Children can paint pictures for relatives and friends whom they cannot visit.
- Keep writing letters – one can remain in contact with friends and relatives. Maybe you also still have some postcards.
- Telephone or chat with friends and relatives.
- Make Easter decorations with your children; you can make your residence look nicer in this way.
- There are audio books, CDs and exciting podcasts for every genre and every age group. Discuss the listened-to content with your child.
- Children who are learning an instrument can study a new piece. Friends and relatives will be happy to receive a video or audio file.
- If you have a garden, you can have your child help with garden work. Maybe create their own flower bed.
- TV, social media and computer games can also be enjoyed. Try to accompany your children as often as possible with these activities and talk with them about the content of films, series, YouTube videos and games.

Digital lessons – learning at home

Schools have already been closed for three weeks now. But the objective and standard of all school activity remains unaffected: to guarantee students' learning progress as well as possible under the given conditions.

The question of digital support plays a key role in this regard. In some cases, ad hoc solutions and support have been established to help recreate a channel between teachers and students even outside of the classroom.

Experiences with teachers, and your selective feedback, are things we have summarised into some key basic rules which are capable of further guiding us in the following days and weeks.

- Continue to pay attention to resilient structures (exchange and feedback are important – keep your children in contact with their teachers),
- Ensure that students exchange information with each other and with their teachers,
- Accompany your children's daily planning and weekly planning, such as you will design it for the next few days with their teachers,
- The use of analogue and digital media, and corresponding analogue and digital work products, is a sensible mix,
- With apps and programs, it makes sense to focus on a few selected platforms and digital tools,
- The goal is not to represent a class 1:1 virtually – this is hardly possible (in terms of both time and technology), and study and break times need to be properly balanced,
- As a result, project-like work orders are more often the means of choice,
- There are no technical requirements for digital learning as a matter of course, and this means that there will also be analogue alternative offers.

For all this, there are lists of materials, with links to digital teaching content and digital tools, already available on the education server <https://www.bildung-mv.de/online-lernen-materialpool/> as well as on the State moodle training platform <https://elearn.bildung-mv.de/>

But there is even more:

To give you suggestions for your children's work, with the help of a young entrepreneur from Neubrandenburg (Mr. Martin Horst) we are aiming to develop a platform for domestic education and work opportunities during the necessary transition period. Please have a look at the announcement at the following link: www.discomv.de

This platform will be built in the next two to three weeks, and will be sustained by the fact that many people, not just teachers but also you, as parents, are capable of sharing your own materials, experiences and interesting sources (from diaries to everyday explanatory films).

We also get a lot of requests from parents supporting their children during their studying at home. Since home-based learning cannot be compared with that which is known as homework over an extended period, such learning / work tasks require further accompaniment in that the objectives, the expected time required and the independent success monitoring must all be outlined. This should help to structure the time burden on students and avoid overload.

It is clear that all of you are currently already doing everything to stimulate, accompany and monitor home-based learning with interesting work tasks. Understand the information as an initial inventory of what has been achieved so far, as a basis for guidance and as a source of information about accompanying offers which have already been made and which are currently under construction.

Assessments during the school closures period

Our objective is to provide students with the best possible help under these difficult circumstances and to maintain educational opportunities as best as possible. At the time of writing there is a variety of self-organised learning opportunities available. To offer students the best possible support regarding upcoming exam preparations, appropriate forms of teaching the content to be learned will be chosen.

This situation is an unusual one, both for students and for teachers and parents. Honestly, nobody was prepared for the current situation, and certainly not trained for it. For this reason, it is important that this challenge be mastered together, even with all the emotional stress.

As life goes on in spite of everything, it is fully clear that students' grades are of major importance both for students and of course for you, the parents. With the following advice we would like to provide support to those who want more assurance when it comes to handling performance assessments and evaluations.

1. Of course, one should take the current situation into account when it comes to performance determination and evaluation. The school closures should not mean that the students become disadvantaged in terms of their grading.
2. Both students and legal guardians will be informed in as much detail as possible about the requirements, and the type of proof of performance required, and their weighting, and the possibilities of adequate preparation. Overall, adequate communication with legal guardians is necessary at this time. That said, it is our purpose to relieve parents (unconditionally) of the feeling that they need to assume the role of teacher. This is, and of course remains, the task of the State's teachers, even if the situation has imposed enormous challenges on both us and you.
3. Regarding the content and scope of the learning tasks given: it is the teachers who will generally decide on the basis of the applicable framework plans, at their own pedagogical discretion. That said, content from all subjects should be taken into account as a matter of principle. It is important to mind that, as they go about their learning tasks, students are not overburdened, either in terms of scope or in terms of requirements. Independent learning at home by no means substitutes regular lessons in terms of scope of tasks, processing time and intensity.
4. Any performance evaluation shall be based on the curricular requirements and with a balanced exercise of educational discretion. The performance assessment results shall be evaluated by teachers.
5. In the case of primary schools, we recommend not doing grading of assigned learning tasks. As far as further lesson planning goes, it is really teachers who should document and evaluate the status of completed learning tasks. Students should receive verbal feedback on completed work as part of assessment.
6. In secondary school (Year 1), it is possible to conduct a performance assessment in agreement with students with the aim of improving performance. The element of independence with such a performance must be recognisable.

7. School year completion is also assured in this school year. If, pursuant to § 6 Parag. 5 of the Performance Evaluation Ordinance, the minimum required count of proof of achievement cannot be provided in justified individual cases, the class conference shall decide on the weighting of the provided proof of achievement to determine the overall mark. The current situation should also be explicitly taken into account in this regard. In the drafting of final performance evaluations, the count of mandatory classwork and other work during the school year (as per §§ 4 and 7 of the Performance Evaluation Ordinance) can be reduced.

In addition, the possibilities under § 2 Parag. 2 of the Ordinance on Transfers, Class Classification and Course Changing and on Professional Maturity in General Education Schools must also be considered from the outset. Accordingly, when deciding whether successful participation in the next higher year can be expected, it is also necessary to involve (inter alia) circumstances which can have an impact on a student's learning behaviour and performance. Exceptional conditions, such as e.g. prolonged loss of lessons, must be taken into account.

8. Graduations will be ensured in this school year. In regional school and integrated comprehensive school final classes with the goal of the *Mittlere Reife*, in the event of outstanding performance reviews which are absolutely necessary, substitute services (as per § 6 of the Performance Evaluation Ordinance) in the form of homework can be provided. The same applies for the second and fourth school semesters in the qualification phase for the high school *Oberstufe* as per § 23 *Oberstufe* and *Abitur* Exams Ordinance (version dated 19 February 2019) and § 5 *Abitur* Exams Ordinance (version dated 8 August 2014). Homework assignments can be submitted by email or through other digital channels, as well as by post. Here too, the element of independence with such a performance must be recognisable.

9. Students whose marks up to 13 March inclusive give cause for concern for transfer, in particular, must be granted opportunities to improve their marks in consultation with their legal guardians.

Support services and important telephone numbers

Specially for children

The number for grievances against the Child Protection Association
Nationwide guidance, free and anonymous; telephone, email and chat function
Tel: 11 6 111 (Monday to Saturday from 14:00 to 20:00)
www.NummerGegenKummer.de

Specially for parents

Parental stress telephone Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Tel: 0385 / 4791570 (Monday to Friday from 14:00 to 17:00)

Nationwide parental telephone
Tel: 0800 / 1110550 (Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 11:00 and Tuesday to Thursday from 17:00 to 19:00)

Additional hotlines

Citizens' telephone (Corona hotline) of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern State government
Tel: 0385 / 588 11311
Office hours for information on the subject of school: Monday to Friday from 08:00 to 18:00

Citizens' telephone of the Federal Ministry for Health
Tel: 030 / 346 465 100 (Monday to Thursday from 08:00 to 18:00, Friday from 08:00 to 12:00)
and additional hotlines at:
<https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/service/buergertelefon.html>

Telephone pastoral care
Tel: 0800 / 111 0 111 and 0800 / 111 0 222 and 116 123
www.telefonseelsorge.de

Pastoral care hotline number of the North Germany church
Tel: 0800 / 4540106
<https://www.nordkirche.de/>

Child protection hotline of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Telephone guidance and help
Tel: 0800 / 1414007

Support phone line – sexual abuse
Tel: 0800 / 22 55 53
<https://beauftragter-missbrauch.de/hilfe/hilfetelefon>

Questions on care and social institutions
Tel: 0385 / 588 19995 (Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 17:00)
<https://www.regierung-mv.de/Landesregierung/sm/Service/Corona/>