

Week 16
Riding the Emotional Anxieties of the New School Year one
Breath at a Time
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This school year will be one of the most challenging openings most of us have ever known. Aside from the general anxieties and struggles of starting a new school year, students and especially parents will be facing more difficult choices and fears. Many questions remain which in turn cause anxieties and stress for families.

1. Is school going to open?
2. What will school look like?
3. Will schools be safe?
4. Will all my children be able to go to school, depending upon age or needs?
5. How will I know the community spread in my school to make an informed decision about attendance?
6. Will my children loose precious skills if they don't attend school or if they attend virtually?
7. How will I keep my child and family healthy and safe at the same time?
8. How will I work and have my children doing school remotely at the same time?

These are just some of the questions swirling around in the uncharted waters facing families. These unknowns as we might call them, have created a great deal of stress and anxiety for families.

As a recap:

Anxiety is described as: feelings of tension, worried thoughts, physical changes such as increased blood pressure and increased heart rate. Anxiety can make it difficult for people to make choices in their life, make it difficult to function, and may cause one to feel unmotivated and overwhelmed.

So what do we do? It's important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react in stressful situations. As such, parents can and should acknowledge some level of concern for the upcoming school year panic however, is not what we want to demonstrate. Teaching positive preventative measures, speaking with children about their fears and giving children some sense of control can reduce anxieties. This is the perfect time for adults to demonstrate problem solving, flexibility and compassion.

Some Tips for Parents:

1. Be a role model (children learn from your example).
2. Try not to demonstrate your anger or fear about the upcoming school year to your children. As parents feel frustrations with the academic plans, they will likely have negative and perhaps positive feelings about the plans, try to focus on the positives.
3. Be honest and accurate with your children about the upcoming school year. Explain procedures as best possible depending upon your child's level of understanding and age range.
4. Locate additional learning resources in your community.
5. Stay in touch with school and other families in your community to continue to be informed.
6. Some families are creating "pods" where smaller groups of students get together to either learn or socialize, speak with friends/neighbors to see if this is occurring in your community.
7. Review district plans, including whether or not parents can change the type of instruction their child is to receive depending upon individual circumstances.
8. Let your child know ahead of time that school plans might change at any time depending upon community spread etc., so they can prepare for any adjustments. Have a back-up plan.
9. Remind children that learning can and does take place everywhere, at home, at school and in the community.
10. If your child's school is not opening with in person learning, establish a routine for academics within the home.
11. If your child is going to school, speak with them about the changes they will see in their school building, social distancing, masks, desks moved apart, fewer students in the classroom, perhaps plexi-glass partitions, teachers with masks etc.
12. Monitor your child's emotional health. Look for increased stress and anxiety. Contact your school's counseling staff if noticeable changes occur.
13. Keep an eye out for increased bullying, let your child know that the virus has nothing to do with who a person is, what language they speak etc.
14. Remind your child of all the pro-active things they can do to keep themselves safe like washing hands, getting proper sleep, eating right and exercising.

15. Most of all keep in mind that you are trying your best in these uncertain times, stay positive and remain informed.