

Preparing to Work & Parent Through a COVID Kind of School Year

3 of 3 Part Series

There are a lot of uncertainties for everyone as we prepare for the 2020-21 school year. As a parent, it is especially difficult to know how to plan for this year. While we all want to see children return to in-person classrooms, we know that the reality is that many students will at least begin their school year virtually. Parents really need to do what they can to plan for all scenarios: In-person, Remote Learning, and a Hybrid of both plans. We are likely to see one or all these scenarios play out throughout this school year. The saying, "It takes a village to raise a child" is especially true right now. We have compiled some tips to help parents prepare for these different scenarios and help them manage remote work and school under one roof once again.

Take Time to Care for Yourself!

- 1) **Organize and create a plan for your self-care** – Often times we as parents strive to do this for our children, but don't make time to take care of our own needs...healthy eating, exercise, work priorities, rest, fun time, etc).
- 2) **Be flexible** – Be willing to change a routine, approach, or perspective that isn't serving you well. Some of us really thrive on routine, but sometimes we need to adjust what we are doing to make things work better. Change can be disconcerting, especially when it is beyond our control; however, change can also be helpful and very much within our control.
- 3) **Stay connected to healthy and positive support** – Identify people who encourage and uplift you as a parent. It can sometimes be so easy to isolate and think that you are the only parent who is having difficulty. Having healthy and positive support allows you to feel connected to others. We as parents need this support, especially during these challenging times. Make an effort to have adult conversation each day in order to balance out time you may be spending with children.
- 4) **Journal and highlight what you are doing well and give yourself praise** – This tip speaks to gratitude. Take 5 minutes early morning and/or evening to jot down what you did well for the day or the previous day. What are you grateful for in your life and/or as a parent? Write what you have accomplished. Small steps/wins are important and worthy of praise. Journal or say affirmations to promote and infuse a positive outlook and maintain hope.
- 5) **Nurture your resiliency** – Remind yourself of how you've bounced back from challenges. Keeping your ability to navigate challenges fresh in your mind allows you to build self-confidence and refresh your positive attitude about the future. Share examples of your resiliency (have bounce back conversations) with children, family, partners, colleagues or friends to inspire yourself and others.
- 6) **Practice letting go of the things you cannot control as parents** – Every child goes through developmental stages, and during the COVID-19 pandemic you may notice these stages more. As you see growth and changes, give yourself some grace and compassion around the developmental stages and identify what support you or your child/teen may need.

7) **Indulge in Self-Compassion daily** – Self-compassion is a mindfulness skill and allows you to be present in the moment. Given you are human and make mistakes and struggle sometimes, practicing self-compassion is important in order to be kind to yourself and to give yourself grace. Use positive self-talk such as, “I am doing the best that I can. I am not alone. I can get through this difficult time.” If you practice giving yourself grace, you will be more willing to do so with others.

8) **Set boundaries with yourself and others** – Boundaries are for ensuring self-care, not about forcing others to do what you want. By setting clear limits in your roles as parent, partner, employee or friend, you protect yourself from overcommitting and being taken advantage. Modeling healthy boundaries will also teach children respect, love and assertiveness, and help provide structure and safety in this time of uncertainty.

9) **Discover something new about yourself** – Take a self-assessment of what you like and enjoy. Embrace what you discover and allow it flourish. Make an action plan and take steps to develop a new interest/skill or hobby, or to get involved in a project that you’ve always wanted to do.

10) **Practice mindful nutrition to combat stress** – Being mindful of your caffeine and sugar intake during stressful times can help to manage anxiety, and balanced levels of Vitamin D and magnesium can assist with depression and sleep concerns. Remember to eat, don’t skip meals, and have your favorite healthy snacks available and nearby. It’s easy to forget while managing school schedules and work schedules simultaneously. Something is better than nothing!

11) **Establish a sleep routine** – Getting good rest can fortify your immune system and coping abilities. A good place to start is to identify the optimal time to go to sleep and work backwards to develop a routine that will support it. [Learn more](#) suggestions for sleep during the COVID-19 pandemic.

12) **Exercise and get outdoors** – Spend time outside each day (before, during and/or after your workday is done), even if it’s just a few minutes. This allows you to breath fresh air, take in the sights, sounds and smells, and soak in sunshine (or a little rain won’t hurt). Nature helps you feel calmer and adding a few deep breaths or physical exercise can enhance positive effects.

13) **Take breaks** – Go to your car to listen to your favorite song, take a walk, call a friend, stretch or sit still and meditate. It’s amazing how just 5 or 10 minutes helps us recharge!

14) **Seek support when needed** – Remember you are not alone and it’s okay to ask for help. Reach out to the Emory Faculty Staff Assistance Program or WorkLife Resource Center, talk with your manager, or ask your family, friends or community resources for assistance.

Resources

- *Self-Compassion for Parents: Nurture Your Child by Caring for Yourself*, by Susan M. Pollak
- *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength and Thrive*, by Kristin Neff
- [Emory WorkLife Resource Center](#)
- [Faculty Staff Assistance Program](#)
- [Working Through COVID-19](#)