

# The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

Home & School

*"Together We Can Make a Difference"*



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By Skip Forsyth

For those old enough to remember the 60's created a period of unrest. Bob Dylan penned a song, *"The Times They Are A-Changin'."*

Fast forward 50 years, different challenges- same song. A year ago, we were actively planning for the 2019 Parental Involvement Conference at San Marcos. This year, the 2020 conference has been suspended until 2021. A few months ago, schools were planning proms, graduations, and end of year events that were suddenly interrupted. Now schools are planning for some type of back-to-school and remote learning experience. As Walt Disney quipped, *"Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future."*

The coronavirus and our response to it has created seismic change in our communities, and especially in our schools. Students have been displaced from familiar surroundings and well-rehearsed routines. They have been distanced, and in some cases disconnected, from teachers and friends. Parents have become instructors, and teachers have become academic coaches. For families, employment has been significantly disrupted with work-at-home strategies, furloughs, and terminations. The current civil unrest in some communities increases anxiety.

In the face of change and sometimes a feeling of chaos, how do we move forward? The philosopher Socrates offered this sage advice, *"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new."*

- ◆ ZOOM meetings are no longer a novelty but a necessity.
- ◆ Drive-by parades now acknowledge birthdays and other special events.
- ◆ Curbside pick-up is now commonplace.
- ◆ For some, work-from-home is not an alternative but the new normal.
- ◆ Remote teaching and learning, even with its flaws, helps to keep students and families connected to their schools.
- ◆ Virtual instruction will improve and lead to more personalized learning.
- ◆ Parent and family engagement is increasingly about two-way communication and relationships of trust.

As the new school year commences, candid, two-way communication will be required as home and schoolwork together for student success. Change is coming. It's expected. It's inevitable. It's an opportunity that produces benefits. Educators and parents must work in harmony to leverage change to elevate student achievement. You can lament change or embrace it. You can look forward with expectation or look back with exasperation. Billy Cox puts it this way, *"Life will only change (for the better) when you become more committed to your dreams than you are to your comfort zone."*

## Summer's End

No flowers to plant,  
No garden to tend,  
As summertime lazily  
Comes to an end.  
It's time to sit back  
And deliciously savor  
The beauty of the season  
And the fruits of our labor.  
Farewell to summer;  
For autumn make way,  
With this last celebration  
We call Labor Day.

By Nancy Hughes



# COVID 19 and the Grief Process

Many of us are grieving. We are grieving the loss of our freedoms, a predictable future, and the lives of many Americans. We are fearful about our jobs and our shared future in ways that were unimaginable just a short time ago. That said, our individual responses to these fears can vary quite a bit. I'd like to suggest, however, that by using the universally shared experience of grief, perhaps we can gain a bit of insight into our individual as well as our collective reactions.

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gives us a clinical insight into the somewhat universal process of how human beings grieve. Essentially, she provided us with a listing and explanation of the five common stages of grief. Although, these stages can be fluid, most will experience variations of all five stages.

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Despair
5. Acceptance



**Denial** is the intellectual and emotional rejection of something that is clear and obvious.

**Anger.** The feeling of anger is empowering. We move toward anger in an attempt to gain control over our fears. Rather than accepting and dealing with the problem, we turn hostile, blaming others and engaging in power struggles.

**Bargaining** occurs when denial breaks down and we start to acknowledge reality but we are not ready to give up the illusion that we still have control. Basically, we try to compromise to find an easier, less painful way out.

**Despair** occurs when reality fully sets in and there is no more room for denial. There is a sense of hopelessness, a feeling that we are not in control and all is lost. We engage in self-pity. We regret the fact that our attempts at bargaining have not worked.

**Acceptance** occurs when we finally acknowledge and surrender to the facts, whatever those facts happen to be. When we reach this stage, we can stop denying and fighting reality, and we can start to deal as effectively with what has happened and what is happening.

**Role Loss.** One final concept to consider when talking about grief is *role loss*. Role loss is not simply the loss of something or someone close to us, which is deeply painful. Role loss is not just missing that something or someone, it also means missing our relationship to that something or someone.

There is a lot of role loss going on right now. We grieve not being a helpful leader at work, and not being able to throw that work birthday party with the cookies that everyone likes. We are grieving our roles – our routines, our journey, and most of all our regular contact with those who are on our journey with us. It's all hard.

The important thing is to give yourself some time to work through these emotions at your own pace. It takes time to integrate this loss into your life, but this is especially true when your normal daily routines have been disrupted.

The good news is that people tend to be resilient in the face of grief. Once the immediate crisis has passed, people are usually able to reach a place of acceptance where they are able to adapt and find ways to cope with their loss.

covid-19-and-the-grief-process by Robert Weiss, Ph.D., MSW

## Parents: Meaningful Questions You Should Ask Your Child's Teacher

By Terry Heick

Back-to-school content is usually focused on teachers and students, and as these two groups will have the largest workload ahead of them, that makes sense. But for students, the ultimate support system is not an expert teacher, but an informed and supportive family.

Below are some questions to better clarify what's happening in the classroom, and then help you decide on the kind of actions you can perform at home to truly support the learning of your child.

### QUESTIONS YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER WOULD (PROBABLY) LOVE TO ANSWER

1. How do you respond when a child struggles in class?
2. What are the most important (content-related) ideas my child needs to understand by the end of the year?
3. How are creativity and innovative thinking used on a daily basis in your classroom?
4. How is critical thinking encouraged in your classroom?
5. What can I do to support literacy in my home?
6. What kinds of questions do you suggest that I ask my children on a daily basis about your class?
7. How exactly is learning personalized in your classroom?
8. How do you measure academic progress?
9. What are the most common instructional or literacy strategies you will use this year?
10. What are the best resources that we should consider using as a family to support our child in the classroom?
11. Is there technology you'd recommend that can help support my child in self-directed learning?

Excerpts from: [Parents: Meaningful Questions You Should Ask Your Child's Teacher](#)



## INTERNET SAFETY REMINDERS DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

With so many school closures amidst the COVID-19 crisis, we are seeing many companies step up and offer free online learning resources for families.

Before COVID-19, children at school would be protected by systems that filter or restrict access to online content such as pornography, viruses, and unmoderated social media. Schools use filters and blacklists (lists of websites or other resources that aren't allowed) which are applied to school devices or through the school internet connection. We want to remind everyone that with more screen time comes more responsibility for parents to check those devices! Since many parents are using online curricula and learning apps, here are some reminders of how to keep children safe from



child predators when connected to the internet.

1. Try not to allow children to have their phones, laptops, or tablets in their bedrooms. A connection to the internet gives your child access to adult content and allows others to contact your children through video game chats, social media apps, and chat rooms. Have your kids work or play near you. If you are working, give your child or yourself headphones!
2. Always check daily your children's devices, search history, their posts, emails, texts and social media direct messages. If it's too much work and parents don't have time, then limit the apps your children have for you to manage.
3. Have a talk with your children about internet safety and online predators, and let them know that it's not just stranger danger.
4. Always have social media accounts turned to private and turn off location tracking. Also, on an iPhone, make sure you set your camera to NEVER allow your child's location to be seen. To do this go to Settings>Privacy>Location Services (ON) >Camera set to NEVER.
5. Don't feel guilty about screen time but DO make sure you are paying attention. Be on the lookout for signs your child might be a target of a predator.
6. Don't forget to have fun with your kids and learn how to play some of their favorite games with them. When you show an interest, your kids will open up to you and be more willing to share!

We know that this is a hard time for all of us, but we are working to keep all kids safe.

<https://childrescuecoalition.org/educations/9-internet-safety->

## COUNTDOWN TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

**The start of school is the most exciting time of the year for students!**

They want to meet their teachers, catch up with their friends, and begin exploring a whole new world of knowledge. As exciting as these first weeks of school are, your children can't do this on their own. They need your help to get ready—now and every day. You need to read aloud to young children to reinforce the importance of literacy. You have to be ready to help them when they're stuck on homework. You need to build relationships with their teachers so you're all working together to provide your children the best learning experience possible. Helping your children with school is one of your most important jobs as a parent. That's why the U.S. Department of Education, National PTA, and *Parenting* have teamed up to bring you *Countdown to School Success*. This booklet takes you step-by-step through the typical school-year calendar, explaining how you can help your children at home, support them in the classroom, and assist their teachers as they address each of your children's unique abilities. We hope your whole family enjoys following this road map to the exciting year ahead.

**1. Reach out to your kids' teachers.** Attend meet-the-teacher night, orientation, or other welcome events, but don't stop there. Make a point of introducing yourself and learning about class activities and expectations for the year. Find out how each teacher prefers to communicate. Many use e-mail as the main form of contact, but phone calls and conferences (make an appointment first) are usually welcome, too. For more advice on building a parent-teacher relationship that will last the entire year, as well as links to all the websites featured in this guide, go to [parenting.com/success](https://parenting.com/success).

**2. Get in the groove.** Establish healthy at-home routines for school days, such as consistent waking times and getting-ready patterns. Decide on a regular homework time, and create a comfortable, quiet work space. Set bedtimes that allow elementary-age kids to get 10 to 12 hours of sleep; teens should get 8½ to 9½ hours.

**3. Time things right.** Stay on top of everyone's school, activity, and work schedules with a free online calendar or a smartphone app.

**4. Commit to volunteering.** With help from parents like you, your school can offer many more programs and services for your kids. Join your school's PTO and ask about volunteer opportunities in the school community and your children's classrooms.

For full article, go to: <https://www.ed.gov/parents/countdown-success>



## Home-Schooling Tips & Resources

Many schools across the state of Texas may begin the school year with a return to virtual learning. Here are some tips and resources you can use to help your child learn at home.

Set aside designated times when you know you'll have dedicated 1-on-1 time with your child especially if you are working from home. This can be time to read together, breaks during the day, and a clear lunchtime to catch up on their day. Knowing you have designated "together time" can help you keep boundaries at other times. But remember that having kids means getting interrupted. Be clear and specific on the best way to be interrupted. Ideas can be as simple as requesting a knock on the door or prearranged when you are on the phone.

- Figure out when your child is the most alert physically and mentally. This will be the best time for them to tackle the subjects they struggle with most or subjects that require more mental focus like math or writing.
- Take breaks. Schedule time during the school day for exercise, lunch, snacks, and age-appropriate breaks.
- Build in time for creativity. Make time for music, art, and other creative subjects. This may include time for your child to practice an instrument, draw, paint, try their hand at drama or develop other skills like cooking, if you can supervise. Have younger children practice counting by stacking blocks or build a fort from sheets.
- Help your child stay connected with friends and family. Work with your child's school, their friends' parents, and others to help them stay in touch. Having your child write letters to people they care about is a good way to practice their handwriting.

Don't hesitate to reach out to your child's teachers for teaching tips and advice as you support your child at home. Be sure to contact your child's teachers or school to resolve issues that may come up with technology, assignments, and more.

[Try These Home-Schooling Tips. Resources](#)



### Try to make home learning feel like their classroom learning environment

- Establish a routine for learning at home. Set and follow a weekday schedule for starting and ending the school day and going to bed. All children benefit from structure, even if they try to resist it.
- Consider your child's age. Transitioning to home-based learning will be very different for a preschool student than a middle or high school student. Discuss your expectations for learning at home and go over any concerns so you are on the same page. You may even consider writing up some classroom rules.
- Keep things simple and set a goal of a few hours of learning per day. Have your child read for an hour a day, then do some math practice for around 30 minutes, and finally add in some science and social studies. Be mindful that all this schoolwork doesn't have to be done in one block of time. It's ok to spread it out.





## 8 tips to help your child return to school

Over the next few weeks, children across the state of Texas will begin returning to school. Chances are that this school year will look and feel different for everyone. Going from quarantine to having new school routines, classrooms, classmates, teachers, school rules, and, in some cases, new schools may be causing them to feel anxious. To help make

their transition easier, here are 8 tips to help your child return to the classroom.

### 1. Take their emotional temperature.

Encourage your child to discuss their feelings about returning to school. This may require a difficult conversation about the pandemic and focusing on their school's safety measures. Let them know it's perfectly normal if they feel anxious or worried and that you and their teachers are there to support them. Try to find creative and natural ways of bringing up the conversation without putting pressure on them – for instance when you're playing with them, or going for a walk. Finally, avoid sharing any anxieties you may have as not to create new fears within them.

### 2 Make sure they understand the rules.

Your school will soon begin explaining new procedures in place for reopening – such as social distancing rules. Explain the school's social distancing and hygiene rules and why they are in place. This could even mean being distanced from friends throughout their school day. This may be hard to accept, but it is important for them to understand that it's for everyone's safety.

### 3. Make sure you know your part too.

It will be important for you – and your child – to know where and when to drop them off and pick them up, as well as what parts of the school you can access. Your child will be eagerly expecting you at the end of the day, so make sure you, or whoever is picking them up, are in the right place at the right time. Once you have the information from their school, it doesn't hurt to make a practice run before school restarts.

### 4. Pack right, pack light.

Find out what your child should and shouldn't bring to school. Check what they need each morning, to make your child's day easier. Many schools will be phasing out the use of lockers this year. Don't pack extra or unnecessary items. It is likely your child will be carrying a full backpack, and they may also have to wear a mask throughout the day which could make them tire more easily.

### 5. Pack Smart

Make sure your child's backpack never weighs more than 10 to 20 percent of his body weight.

### 6. Give them a break.

For many children, a school day can be exhausting and stressful. This may lead to emotional outbursts later in the day. Given the length of the quarantine and new school safety rules these emotions may be hard to cope with when they return. Allow them to blow off some steam in a healthy way. Try to avoid pushing your child to immediately begin their homework when they get home from school unless it's truly necessary. Give them a set time to "chill out" before they have to refocus and reengage their brains in homework.

### 7. Keep an eye on your child's moods.

Given the social distancing rules, children may be asked to do assignments differently. This may create fresh challenges for your child, from working with new classmates and teachers, to coping with new methods for getting their schoolwork done. Try to stay informed about how your child is adjusting and coping and if you're concerned, reach out to their teachers.

### 8. Finally, get some rest!!!

Your family may have gotten used to some unusual hours during quarantine. Make sure you and your children are returning to normal bedtime and getting a good night's sleep. Begin this new sleep routine at least a week before your children return to school. A good night's rest will help them to return to school and it will help you support them too.

Excerpt from: [Returning to school after lockdown](#)





## What is a parent-teacher conference?

A parent-teacher conference is a meeting between you and your child's teacher to discuss your child's progress in school. Parent-teacher conferences happen in elementary, middle, and high schools. This meeting may take place as part of the regularly-scheduled conferences held by the school each year, or your child's teacher may contact you to schedule a meeting at other times during the school year.

You can also request a conference with your child's teacher if you have questions or concerns about your child by contacting the teacher to set up a meeting.

## How will I know when to go to the conference?

Usually, your child's teacher will contact you to schedule a meeting time. If you work during the day and can only go to conferences after working hours, be sure to let your child's teacher know that so you can schedule a meeting time that is convenient for both of you.

## What if I don't speak English?

If you do not feel comfortable speaking with your child's teacher in English, you have the right to request that an interpreter attend the conference, or to bring an interpreter that you trust to the conference. If you request an interpreter from the school, make the request at least 24 hours before the conference. Your child's school also may have a bilingual parent liaison who can help you find an interpreter. It's important to find a way to overcome the language barrier in order to meet with your child's teacher.



## Parent-Teacher Conference Checklist

### Before the conference

- Ask your child how she feels about school.
- Ask your child if there is anything that he wants you to talk about with his teacher.
- Tell your child that you and the teacher are meeting to help her.
- Make a list of topics that you want to talk about with the teacher.
- Prepare a list of questions such as:
  1. *What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?*
  2. *Does my child hand homework in on time?*
  3. *Does my child participate in class?*
  4. *Does my child seem happy at school?*
  5. *What can I do at home to help?*

### During the conference

- Be on time (or early) for the meeting.
- End the meeting on time. Other parents will probably have a conference after yours.
- Relax and be yourself.
- Stay calm during the conference.
- Ask the most important questions first.
- If your child receives special services such as English classes, ask about your child's progress in those classes.
- Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand.
- Ask your child's teacher for ways that you can help your child at home.
- Thank the teacher.

### After the conference

- Talk about the conference with your child.
- Talk about the positive points and be direct about problems.
- Tell your child about any plans you and the teacher created.
- Keep in touch with the teacher during the school year.

See full article at:

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/tips-successful-parent-teacher-conferences-your-childs-school>

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### The Parent and Family Engagement Connection Home & School "Together We Can Make a Difference"

The Parent and Family Engagement Connection is posted on our website four times a year for parents and educators of Texas. This newsletter is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, German, Tagalog and Korean.



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