

# RE-ENTERING SCHOOL AFTER A PANDEMIC

## A PARENTING WORKSHOP

# *Workbook*



### **PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY**

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## intro



### **Presenter**

- Ashley Ayala, LMFT, accredited parent coach and the founder of The Modern Parent, LLC
- Mother to two
- Specialize in working with children ages 0-12 with a strong emphasis in providing caregivers the tools to best support themselves and their children
- Experience working in elementary schools, a high school, and a clinic setting.
- Working in schools provided me valuable insight into how children navigate a huge part of their lives outside of the home

### **Workshop**

- Covers many items including your own feelings having your kids go back to in person learning
- Provides you with resources if it begins to impact your child's functioning
- You should feel knowledgeable on how to talk with your children about returning to school along with a few strategies and fun games in your pocket

### *NOTES*

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# self check



## **How are you doing?**

- Different experiences between households
- These structures shaped each person's feelings about returning to in-person learning
- As the adult, it is valuable to take the time to acknowledge and respect exactly where you are with this process.
  - The value in doing this is to make the space to appreciate your own feelings, thoughts, and narrative with the association
  - As well as be able to attend to how ever our children are feeling without projecting our own feelings onto them
- We don't want to accidentally skip over their own process and feelings
- Take time to think about your own feelings. Write them down, share with your partner or close friend
- Clarify why you're responding to the thought of returning in the way that you are
- Once you make space for your own process, you'll be able to attend to your child's process and help them navigate through it

## *well informed*



### **Get all of the info!**

- So many questions, hopefully all the answers
- Communication will occur as to what the return will be like
- It also may change along the way
  - Ambiguity is a part of life and it's okay to sit with it
- If you're able to gain as much info as to how the return will be structured and what it will look like, that will help decrease your nerves as well as your children's
- Expectations will be shared by the school
  - Example, masks required, plexi glass between tables or desks, inability to walk your kiddos into class or enter campus
- We want to trust that the school is 100% transparent and provides us with all the info that they know when they know it

### **Questions to ask:**

- Can I walk my child to class/ walk them into class?
- Will my child be able to receive on site services such as speech, social skills groups, psych testing, SST's, IEP's?
- Will I be able to attend meetings for these types of services?
- How will recess be structured?
- What is expected of my child in regards to safety guidelines (keep distance from others/mask on all day/hand washing frequently)?
- How is discipline managed if my child has trouble following the new guidelines (not keeping mask on/disinterest in keeping space from others)
- Some of the changes may bring up a lot of feelings. Continue to monitor your feelings and have a safe space to express them. That way you can attend to your children without spilling your upset onto them
  - That does **NOT** mean that you shouldn't share your feelings with your children when necessary
  - Upset (including sadness, anger, frustration, disappointment) are feelings that we all have and there is nothing wrong with letting your kids see that they exist in you too.
  - When we have that knee jerk reaction and unload in front of our kids, they often absorb that

# verbiage & tips



## **Words matter**

- The way we talk about things becomes the way our children think, feel, and talk about it too
- Can be good to come prepared
- It is important to convey that it is safe and to increase their feelings of security around leaving you
  - Increasing feelings of safety can be especially helpful for:
    1. Families who have had underlying health conditions and had to be extra careful and distanced from others
    2. For children who are more sensitive and reactive to the pandemic over the last year
- For some, they have been at home with a caregiver this entire time and leaving your side may cause feelings of anxiety

## **Sample scripts:**

- Straight to the point
  - Benefits: No ambiguity. No guessing. Clear and succinct

*Hey hon I have some news to share. The teachers and I have decided that it is safe enough to return back to school. We will be going back on \_\_\_\_ (date/amount of days/weeks) to in person learning \_\_\_\_ days per week (hybrid/full time). What do you think about that?*

- Setting the stage
  - Benefits: Great for younger children who may need the stage set a bit to wrap their head around going to school if they haven't at all or a great length of time has passed since they ended

*Hey babe do you remember when we went to Valley Parent Preschool? You got to play with friends and all their cool toys there and do lots of activities? Well remember how we had to \_\_\_\_ (stop going/switch to zoom school) to make sure everyone kept safe and healthy? Well now it safe enough to go back to school and play with our friends and all of their fun toys. What do you think about that?*

- Let the child talk and lead the conversation
- More verbiage for your follow up to your child's questions:

*"Going back will be a change that may bring up lots of feelings. We decided it was safe to return and these are the ways we will continue to ensure everyone stays safe and healthy. I will be here to help you through going back and whatever questions and feelings arise".*

- Tips: Have open convos and be honest. If you don't know an answer you can say "oh that's a great question! I am not sure of the answer but as soon and I know, I will tell you"
- Have a countdown calendar (either one you can cross off the days until you return or a ring calendar)

## beelin good



### **Decrease nerves and increase positive associations**

- You can help to decrease their nervous feelings and increase positive associations with school
- Allowing your child to feel and share their feelings is a special gift
  - Helps you better help your kiddo and teaches them that feelings alone aren't scary.
- Building resiliency:
  1. Notice the difficulty that they are experiencing
  2. Validate it
  3. Talk them through it
  - Playful way to tackle this:

*It sounds like there is a little worry voice in you that is saying 'school feels scary. I don't want to go'. but the thing is that there is another little voice in you too. It is quieter right now but I bet its saying 'school is fun. My friends are there, I have a kind teacher. I can't wait to learn*
- State the facts in relation to the virus:

*I understand you are worried about the virus and getting sick or spreading it to others. We have been so diligent about making sure not to do this and you have been amazing! Because people were so careful, it is now safe enough to go back to school. There are still some rules to make sure it continues to be okay like wearing our mask and of course washing our hands. But that's it!*
- Give your kids agency:
  - Choose the clothes they may wear for school
  - Visit the school if its new
    - Drive by or walk the campus
  - Show a picture of their teacher
  - Draw pictures or write a story to express their feelings/ expectations
  - Back to school shopping together and let them pick out the note books/back pack

# social skills



## **Social skills and developmental milestones**

- Common questions that I have been asked are “is my child missing out on social skills? How will they be around other kids once given the opportunity?”
  - No they aren’t missing out!
- Once school starts back up, they will hop back into their own normal groove based on their own unique personality.
  - Outgoing playful kid who enjoyed running and engaging with others, they will emerge from the pandemic the same way
  - Reserved kiddo who enjoyed playing with 1-2 close friends and using their imagination they will continue on their curve
- Emotions and response may vary from day to day like any other time
- Kids hit different developmental milestones and grow and enter into new stages
- They may exhibit some “new” behaviors that you have not seen before in a school based setting.
  - Typical for all kids, each year, at all ages
  - Keep your expectations open and make the space for your child's experience,
- Kids learn social skills first from their parents and you are their main source skill building



# signs and symptoms



## **Signs of anxiety and how to address it**

- Separation anxiety and clingy-ness is a natural reaction to wanting to be closer to a safety person (caregiver) especially during “scary” or “new” times
  - SO good and SO normal.
  - Allow and expect some of it!
- Signs (things you see) and symptoms (things your child shares) that your kiddo may need some extra assistance:
  - Somatic complaints (headache, stomach ache especially around school time/the night before or morning)
  - School refusal (verbal and physical indicators that your child does not want to attend)
  - Lack of appetite
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Crying or withdrawn most of the day
  - Body harm such as hair pulling, nail biting, scratching/picking at skin
  - Anger outbursts such as yelling or becoming aggressive
  - Increased worry that something may happen to a loved one
  - Not wanting you to leave the room
- If you are noticing a marked change in your child that does not dissipate in a 2 weeks and is causing problems in important areas in his/her life, reach out to their pediatrician or mental health professional
- Some things to try if your child is exhibiting some separation anxiety:
  - Begin to label when you notice them getting close to you (when they are giving you extra hugs, sharing that they do not want you to leave to do little things like running errands or leaving the room). Say *“you’re needing some extra hugs from mama today!”*
  - When separating from school share how you will always come back- how you wake up with them, how you return after the errand, come back to them in the room
    - Daniel Tiger has the song “grown ups come back”
  - Fill your child bucket until they are full of mama love/dada love/ mimi love
    - Hug, kiss, love on them until they are full of your love and feel happy and secure.



## resources



### List to refer back to if need be

- You are the expert and know when your kiddo is not doing okay. You know their threshold for stress and tolerance level. If you notice that they are just not doing okay, its your job to reach out for help. Here are resources:
  - Bibliptherapy
    - The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
    - What To DO When You Worry Too Much by by Dawn Huebner
  - School
    - Speak to their teacher about behavior in school and any concerns in the class. They will compare to same age peers
    - School therapist if on site
  - Pediatrician
  - Mental Health professional
    - Clinic or private pay therapist
      - Call insurance and ask for a provider list. Begin to research a therapist that feels like the best fit by reading their bios, checking out their website, and give them a call.
      - Can also find a therapist outside your network and do private pay

## contact info



Thanks for joining me. If you have follow up questions or want to connect, you may email me at **modernparent247@gmail.com**

You can also follow me on IG **@the\_modern\_parent** where I share daily parenting tips, both helpful and humorous

There are also a ton pf helpful articles and a therapeutic book list on my website **www.themodernparent247.com**  
you'll definitely want to hop on my email list

Id LOVE a review of this training! The strengths & needs. Feel free to shoot me an email or message me on IG.