

10 Essential Things To Tell Your Daughter As We Head Into a Pandemic School Year So She Feels Empowered, Not Scared

Going back to school can be a stressful time for children. Whether it's the reluctance to let go of laid back summer days or it's worries about what school will be like, every child is hesitant to start the new year. Adding to this stress is the worry about spreading the Coronavirus. The fear of getting sick or adjusting social behavior can make kids feel confused or scared. If you take the time to help them prepare for the first day of a pandemic school year, you can show your child how to positively deal with their anxieties. To put my child at ease and empower her to have a good year, I've put together a list of things I want my daughter to know when she returns to school.

Children often have a tough time transitioning back to school. So, how can we support them at this time? Think back on what it was like when you were their age and ask yourself these questions.

What worries did you have?

How did you feel?

Were there things you looked forward to?

What do you wish your parents told you about going back to school?

To ease the transition, I comprised a handy guide for my daughter that I would have found helpful at her age. You may find it useful for your child, too.

1. It's okay to feel butterflies about school

Acknowledge that the first days of school may be initially hard. Children may be worried about following social distancing guidelines or getting sick from the Coronavirus. By telling your daughter there's nothing to worry about, her concerns won't be validated and she won't feel reassured. Instead, remind your child that it's okay to feel nervous and that a pandemic school year may look or feel different than previous years. Let her know she'll get through this and that her community is working hard to ensure her safety. Once she adjusts to the new norms, it will become an everyday routine in no time.

2. You can share your feelings

Mentally strong children don't bottle up their emotions. Encourage your kid to express how she feels about going back to school. Again, don't shush away her anxieties. Ask your daughter what she's afraid of. Maybe she's worried about how she will interact with peers or how she will adjust to the new social distancing classroom set up. Even lunch time gatherings will look different and that can cause concerns. Whatever the reason, let your child know it's normal to feel worried.

3. Think positive

Before school starts, talk about the positives of going back to school. You can even have fun together, refreshing her wardrobe or buying bright, cheerful school supplies, like Zoey Koko's Back to School Bundle (<https://zoeykoko.shop>). Though there are new guidelines to observe, this doesn't mean she won't be able to see old friends and build new social groups. She can start playing that favorite sport or activity that she's been looking forward to.

Remember, affirmations aren't just for adults. They can help kids, too, and can boost their self-confidence. If you can teach your daughter how to change her fears into something positive, you build her mental strength.

Here are examples of fears your little girl may have and what she can say instead.

- "I am scared I will get sick." becomes **"I practice good habits to ensure my safety."**
- "I won't be able to hug my friends." is replaced with **"I enjoy my friend's company, even if it looks different."**
- "I'll never be able to learn with this new classroom set up." can change to **"I have all the tools necessary to excel in learning."**

4. Be grateful

This may slip your mind, but expressing gratitude is one of the most important tools I want my daughter to practice when she returns to school. Why? Because using gratitude to go after the good in each day can help your little girl focus on the positives. One way to do this is to have her start a journal where she can list the small things that bring her happiness.

Here are a few questions your daughter can ask herself.

- **What did I love about the day?**
- **What new school adjustments do I like?**
- **Who did I show kindness to?**
- **What am I thankful for today?**

5. I'm here for you if you want to talk

Remind your daughter she can come to you if she's worried about something. Reassure her that you're there to listen. Even if she isn't ready to talk or doesn't have the words to express her feelings, your daughter can still come to you. Sometimes a hug, a cuddle, or physical contact is reassuring enough. In uncertain times, let her be certain of your love.

6. You might mess up at school, but that's okay

Mistakes happen to all of us, adults and kids alike. We can't and shouldn't protect our kids from making them. Learning from mistakes and overcoming adversities teaches them to become mentally strong. Rather than keeping your daughter from making mistakes or trying to solve problems for her, help her learn how to do things better in the future. I know it can be hard to watch your child mess up, but she'll be a much stronger individual if you let her.

7. You're in charge of your emotions

Teach your daughter she's in charge of her feelings and has control over how she thinks, feels, and behaves. You can help by giving her tools to manage her big emotions.

Here are techniques your daughter can use to calm down and regulate her emotions:

- **Slowly count to 10**
- **Make a fist then relax your hand**
- **Take 3 deep breaths**
- **Blow 5 times into your hands**
- **Check your body for tight spots and relax them**
- **Find someone you love and ask for a hug**

8. Plan for the what-if's

Empower your daughter to face her school fears head-on by helping her plan for what-if's. If she's afraid she'll forget her face mask, have her come up with a plan for what she can do to handle it. And remember, what may seem trivial to you, like forgetting a face mask or not having hand sanitizer, may be huge for them. So, as you talk about her worries, big and small, have her plan what to do should those what-if's happen.

9. Things may not be perfect

Remind your daughter things may not be perfect or turn out the way she expects and that it's okay. If you can show her to consider what she learned, what she can do to persevere, and how to stay positive, you help her build mental toughness.

10. You are loved

Finally, and most importantly, let your daughter know that she is very much loved no matter what. Slip a note into her lunch or pencil case with a simple phrase reminding her that she is worthy, strong and capable. There can never be too much love and reassurance given to a child, especially during the uncertainty of a pandemic.

Here's to a Great Start to a New School Year

Hopefully, you found some inspiration in my list of things I want my daughter to know when she returns to a pandemic school year. Remember, every child is different, so pick the ones that you think would best help prepare your little one for her first day of school. And lastly, while things may look different this year, there is still so much to be enjoyed!

Sources:

1. Psychology Today; How to Raise Mentally Strong Kids in Today's World by Amy Morin, September 18, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201709/how-raise-mentally-strong-kids-in-todays-world/>

2. PositivePsychology.com, How to Become Mentally Strong: 14 Strategies for Building Resilience by Michelle Ribeiro, May 18, 2020, <https://positivepsychology.com/mentally-strong/>

3. American Academy of Pediatrics, Caring for Your School Age Child: Ages 5-12 by Shelly Vaziri Flais MD FAAP, Bantam October 2, 2018