

#LIFE & LIVING

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Back to school after more than a year

Schools are opening across the globe. And with this comes the threat of a new wave of COVID transmission. Wara Karim writes about her experience living in the USA and how authorities are planning to cope with the situation as children start attending educational institutions.

This fall, schools around the US are welcoming children for face-to-face instruction despite a new COVID-19 surge.

My daughter was six months into her first grade when a state of emergency was declared and our schools were closed down. From her bedroom, my daughter completed her first grade, began her second grade, and finished that, too. Now after one-and-a-half years at home, she has gone back to school to start her third grade. She could not contain her excitement when I gave her the news of school reopening in person!

If you are a parent, you know how much you and your child are waiting for schools to reopen, because being away from school and their friends has been tough on our children — the pandemic has left their little world in a disarray. Many children, who have started school in this pandemic, do not even know what a school really is.

"I can't wait for the COVID-19 to go away! My son, who is in playgroup, attends his school online. He does not even know what an actual classroom looks like," said Tasnuva Azim, a banker in Dhaka.

Starting a new school year is always an exciting affair, because it marks a new beginning for any child. We have bought new school uniforms, stationery, book bag, and most importantly, new face masks to start in-person school after more than a year.

Yes, there is excitement as we get ready for school every morning. I am happy to see the return of some amount of normalcy to my child's daily life. However, if you ask me whether I am anxious about my child's well-being now that she has started attending



school in person, my answer will be, yes, I absolutely am. Having said that, I also know that her elementary school staff are trying their best to keep her and her friends safe.

No matter where you reside, schools will reopen sooner or later. As parents, we have to do our part to make this transition from virtual learning to face-to-face learning as smooth as we can for our children.

Prepare your child

Your child could be nervous before starting school in person, because after all, they are going back to school after more than a year. Under stay-at-home conditions, many children have lost their social interaction skills, so they could be nervous at the thought of going back to school; one year is a long time for young children.

At the same time, they are also aware of the fact that we are in the middle of a pandemic when thousands are falling ill and dying every day. Many of them have seen their family members suffering from and succumbing to the disease. Therefore, children feeling anxious about leaving home and attending school in person is

only normal.

Therefore, before your children return to in-person schooling, spend time with them, talk to them, and fill their hearts with positivity and encouraging words while at the same time reminding them of the safety measures they must always follow at school. Talk to them about the bright side of in-person schooling! Adjusting to face-to-face instruction could be challenging for children at first simply because they are out of practice. However, do not lose hope. Keep working with your child and her teachers.

Many children's lives have become unstructured after having spent more than a year at home. Before your children return to in-person school, make efforts to bring back routine to their lives, especially to their bedtime and meal times.

Parents need to prepare as well

Parents are out of practice, too. After having spent more than a year without the morning rush hour characterised by preparing breakfast, packing lunch, asking my child half a dozen times to finish her food quickly — I have suddenly woken up to a new

reality. It was stressful under stay-at-home conditions, too, but the nature of the stress was different. Back then, I knew that my child was safe and at home, but now I am having to send my child to the outside world and certainly, I am a little panicky.

In the USA, parents have been instructed to do a daily 'health screening' so we only send our children to school when they are in good health. The school staff members do the same when children arrive at school.

At school, children are spaced with three-feet distance whenever possible. All students, teachers, and staff members wear a mask while indoors and on the school bus. Parents have been asked to send their children with two additional masks in their book bags every day. Disposable masks are also available for children at school. Children are only allowed to take their masks off at the cafeteria and outdoors.

Sanitising and disinfecting surfaces is now the new normal in all business settings. Schools are not any different. My daughter's school encourages its students to wash or sanitise hands regularly. The school staff also sanitise and disinfect high touchpoint surfaces (door knobs, stair railings, bathrooms, office counters, etc.) periodically throughout the day to reduce any possible spread of the virus.

Unlike before, parents are not permitted inside of the school. By allowing fewer visitors into the school building, they can mitigate any possible spread of the virus.

While I am worried about my child's well-being. I also know that our children needed some amount of normalcy in their lives to fare well physically and psychologically; our little men and women have already lost a chunk of their normal childhood to this pandemic.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Collected