

"Old School" Meets "New School": Reframing Developmental Milestones in the COVID-19 Era

Whether your child is attending school in-person, virtually or both this year, concerns about the long-term impact of this disruption to our daily lives and traditional rituals remain. One big question: **How do we reframe crucial life lessons in a way that continues to promote healthy child development?** 98point6 Director of Pediatrics Jud Heugel, MD offers tips and reassurance for giving kids the social and educational fuel they need.



As a parent and a pediatrician, I have confidence in the resiliency of our kids. There's no doubt that the pandemic will affect this generation: they will remember it, and it will alter portions of their developmental dynamic. But if we keep the conversation going—between parents and teachers, adults and kids—there's a real opportunity to foster empathy and emotional intelligence."

Be Your Own Best Parent

First and foremost, remember the adage that you can't serve from an empty vessel. And when you show your kids that you are making self-care a priority, they will understand it's important they do the same, especially during stressful times.

Do as I Do

Little secret: If younger kids see you doing something, they'll want to do it, too—even if they're not willing to tell you. This way of "modeling" normalizes behavior and creates teachable moments. For example, wear a mask in the house occasionally to show them what it might look like in the classroom. When putting it on or taking it off, speak the steps out loud to reinforce the proper steps. Do the same when interacting with a friend or relative and talk about why and how you are maintaining physical distance or meeting outside instead of inside.

Any Attempt Is a Good Attempt

Now is the time for generosity toward others and ourselves—and that approach is its own valuable lesson. Remind yourself and tell your children that these are difficult, uncertain circumstances, and we are all just doing the best we can. Keep the dialogue going, talk openly and honestly, educate and don't be hard on yourself.

The Parent-Teacher Connection

If there was ever a year to truly empower the teacher and make them your ally, it's this one. Whether your child is learning in-class or remotely, we need our kids to buy into this new reality, and that starts by building trust with the teacher. Meet with them early on to discuss your child's specific needs and any concerns you may have. And don't be afraid to ask questions of the teacher or the school—it's your job to be as informed as possible.



Not Sharing Is the New Caring

Offering snacks, giving hugs, trading toys—these normally positive childhood behaviors are off-limits in the time of COVID-19, but the underlying lessons are still crucial. Try reframing the “old school” way with a “new school” twist.

	Milestone	Old School	New School
Age: 3-5 Preschool	Showing affection Sharing Taking turns	Hugging Trading lunches, toys	Creative waves and “air hugs” from afar are less hands-on but just as sincere. Within your household, reinforce old-school affection with lots of close snuggles. Look for opportunities to mimic social and emotional behaviors through pretend play and imagination.
Age: 6-11 K-5	Developing independence Teamwork Positive peer relationships	Walking home from school Sports teams and dance troupes	Give them ownership of an important household task, like being the “inventory manager” for groceries. Encourage “teaming up” in other ways, like an online book club meet-up or a virtual walk for charity.
Age: 12-14 Middle school	Gaining responsibility Forming more complex peer relationships	First job Sleepovers/outings with friends	Brainstorm virtual job opportunities like selling crafts online or being a “technology tutor” to the elderly. Consider forming a “pod” with 1–2 like-minded families to keep social ties strong.
Age: 15-18 High school	Developing stronger sense of self Heightened awareness of social influence	Joining school clubs/activities Hangouts/parties in large groups	Understand teens and young adults are biologically driven to socialize and connect physically, and some things may be out of your control. Keep communication strong and work on driving safe, responsible behavior like wearing a mask, avoiding large gatherings and staying physically distant.
Age: 18-21 College	More exploration of intimate relationships	Dating Leaving home	

Your child is sick. Now what?

First, don’t panic. Although children’s cases are on the rise, COVID-19 is still presenting as a mild illness in most kids. Virtual care remains the safest option, so call your pediatrician for guidance. If you’re on a sponsored plan, 98point6 physicians can assess your child’s symptoms, answer questions and determine next steps, including testing.

