

# UPDATE

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## “The Joy and Pain of Back-To-School”

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Do you remember the Staples’ television commercial promoting “back-to school” sales? A young boy and girl with sad looks on their faces are staring at the camera with the adults dancing in the background, with their shopping carts, to the music “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.” It’s available on YouTube if you want to see it again (or for the first time)! For many parents, it is “the most wonderful time of the year” because we get back on schedule, back to the structure, no more worries about camps and babysitters, no more receiving and sending texts all day to make sure all the kids are taken care of! On the other hand, it might be a feeling of dread as we are back to the homework battles, the fight to get them up in the morning, and the constant tension in the home.

While there are many children who go with the flow and settle in fairly quickly there are those who, like the kids in the commercial, loathe the thought of going back to the grind of school – the pressure of harder work, the excessive homework, the lousy classroom assignment or homeroom, not being in any classes with my friends, etc. Some of our children, particularly those in the younger grades, may be the type to pop out of bed and actually look forward to the experience. Then there are those who begrudgingly get out of bed and lumber out of the house to school with eyes half open, returning home immediately after classes, and then hiding away in their room with their phone or other devices.

We have been consumed by the effects of the COVID pandemic. Our kids and our schools have been greatly impacted. Now, along with the “normal” struggles noted above, everyone’s lives have been disrupted with going virtual, hybrid, or “you pick.” What exactly are the guidelines about vaccines and masks? How do I get my computer to work? Where do I get a computer? We don’t have internet in our area? I hate school, I’m glad I can stay in my pajamas and in my bed all day. I miss seeing my friends. I missed my spring musical, my lacrosse, softball, track, soccer, or volleyball season. I am afraid to get my grandmother sick. Should I wear a mask even though they

say I don’t need to? How can I work when my eight year old is home from school? How can I pay our monthly bills if I can’t work? If you are reading this now, then you have shown the resilience to manage and get through this very difficult period of time.

### Communication is Key

So as parents, what do we do? First and foremost, we need to communicate with our children (much easier said than done in many cases). Work hard to get some information and details about what is going on with them. Listen closely. Observe your child. There are many professionals out there who are expert in mental health or education who can give advice and help, but YOU are the expert when it comes to your child – no one knows them like YOU! Recognize changes. Spend time together doing things that are relaxing and fun. You are more likely to make a better connection in a more comfortable setting. It is also a good practice to take time out each day to talk to one another about ANYTHING – small and relatively minor issues such as the weather, what someone else did at school today, what happened to you at work, etc. This paves the way for a more open communication when your child hits a bump in the road. Think about it...if you didn’t have much of a connection with someone, would that be the person you go to when you really need to talk about a problem? Probably not. It would be much easier to talk with someone you have been talking to all along - that’s why friends are often the first choice.

### Ask For Help

Just like we are asking our kids to ask for help, it is important as parents that we seek the advice and guidance of others as well. These last two and a half years have not been easy for us either. Find some support for yourself as well. If you can’t get through to your child, you may need to reach out to a teacher or guidance counselor. Find out if there are issues at school or is your child flying under the radar. You don’t need to be a helicopter parent, just a concerned, thoughtful, and a helpful one. So, communicate and do it early in the school year – don’t let the problems fester as it will make it more difficult to turn things around.

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Be an advocate for your child and if they are old enough, encourage them to advocate for themselves. For instance, with teachers have them ask for extra help, with guidance counselors have them ask to make an adjustment in their day or get some extra help, and with coaches have them ask what they need to improve upon in order to get more playing time. Try to break the problems down into smaller parts to make them less overwhelming. Maybe a tutor and/or an afterschool session with a teacher would turn it around. Or maybe you discover problems with focus and attention that had not been issues in elementary school. You might find out that there is a problem at

the lunch table or in the hallways. But you can't do anything until you find out what is going on with your child.

If you find that there are other issues like depression, anxiety, or substance abuse, use the supports around you to find additional assistance. Again, guidance counselors can be an extremely valuable resource to help you down the path of helping the child who is struggling. Reach out to a trusted pediatrician or a mental health professional that you may know. Asking questions is free - take advantage of the helpful people around you.

**About Four Winds....** *Four Winds Hospitals are located on two serene campuses in New York State. Four Winds Westchester is 50 minutes north of midtown Manhattan. Four Winds Saratoga is located in Saratoga Springs, 30 minutes north of Albany. Four Winds provides inpatient and outpatient mental health treatment services. We are the leading providers of specialized inpatient psychiatric treatment for children, adolescents and adults in the northeast.*

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