

# Lessons Learned from the Pandemic

## What have you learned about supporting children and families as they have adapted to change?

Families can only handle one day at a time, and they need encouragement. We post “feel good” messages at our drop-off doors and in our weekly messages to parents. They appreciate our commitment to connect with them, and they’ve shared thanks and encouragement back to us at morning drop offs, through email, and at our socially distanced outdoor Thanksgiving food collection event and holiday sing-along.

We want to lessen the burden families feel about learning at home and share lots of different options that encourage their children to wonder, create, explore, and notice things in their home environments and communities. Our teachers are constantly sharing the importance and value of child play, self-directedness, and process vs. product so families know that learning happens through *all* multi-sensory experiences.

## What have you learned about supporting teachers as they have adapted to change?

Just as staff are excellent at loving and meeting the developmental needs of children each moment of each day, administrators need to love and meet the needs of their staffs through intentional daily practices. It’s important to vision together, to unpack health and safety practices, and to welcome questions and listen to concerns. Transparency, attention to details, and following through with an agreed-upon plan will make or break the working relationships and effectiveness of your team.



I started this school year completely differently with staff when we went to in-person instruction in November. Our set-up time doubled in both hours and days, so staff could build relationships with each other and so our administrative team could respond to families before our doors opened. We had brief meetings each day about staff arrival procedures, room arrangements, ways to social distance, cleaning routines, and health and safety protocol agreements. This gave my staff time to hear, reflect, and ask questions. Teachers needed time to adjust to our new routines because everything from dismissal, teaching hours, and cleaning procedures was unfamiliar. I had to model every minute of the day, so the changes became natural and expected.

Has there been a “silver lining,” new discovery, or unexpected growth as a result of adapting to change?



The realization that we can handle and embrace change is empowering. Our “brain growth” has been tremendous! When we shut down at the onset of COVID, we developed new platforms for a virtual distanced-learning experience. That resulted in a web page that will serve us well into the future. We also shifted to a management platform to help align the many different programs we now have to maintain and sustain.

Once we returned to in-person learning in November, we started transforming our outdoor spaces into new learning possibilities. Children love this open-ended learning time where they can wonder, engage, create, think, and be inspired by themselves and others. Daily outdoor time on our covered patio allows for exploring nature and social distancing in the outdoors.

What would you share with families and teachers about facing continued uncertainty and change ahead?

Model imperfection and have a sense of humor! It lightens the mood for everyone in your company. And remember that children have incredible resilience, and they readily adjust to returning to school. They want to be at school, in the company of friends, and they are open to all possibilities (including wearing masks and maintaining socially distanced spaces) if it means they can play with friends. They also take seriously their role in keeping others safe, and they understand when schools need to be closed.



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