



# Challenges Children Face in Classroom After the Pandemic and Ways to Address Them

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The COVID-19 pandemic has driven students to stay at home and switch to home schooling involving instruction through gadgets and by their parents, guardians or teachers online. Transitioning from face-to-face classes to online classes and not being able to talk during recess or play after class was a momentous change for most students. However, for children born during or shortly before the pandemic, the so called “pandemic babies,” the challenge will be the opposite – having face-to-face classes for the first time in their life.

Children who will just be starting school this year have been uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic: they have had to stay indoors for a long time – with little to no opportunity to make friends or socialize thus having fewer stimuli for emotional and physical development.



As a teacher, I've noticed different concerns from the parents of children that are starting their studies or going back to school. Below I'll outline the four major ones and will suggest ways to address them.

## 1. "This is the first school of my child, and she may be a little shy – should we just try to make her go to class every once in a while?"

This is a very valid consideration since children who were stuck at home during the pandemic did not have a chance to play in school or be in class. Some students might have taken online classes from home, but that is considerably different from sitting in a room full of strangers, not having their parents around. It is normal for children to feel reluctant to go to school again.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Jennifer Louie noted that "kids are just really used to being home with their parents now, and there is the added fear that other people are not as safe as we thought they were." Children may feel scared meeting new people, and they may even think that these people will not like them, making them avoid conversation with other students.

What teachers and guardians can do is the following:

- Let parents stay outside the classroom in case their children need them. Shut the door and open it to show a child that their parent is still outside even when the door is closed. It is best to let your child stay in the classroom without seeing you – for them to get used to being in school on their own.
- Remind children that school is a fun place to learn and make friends, and the teachers can always message you to pick them up.
- Talk to your child about their classes. Discuss the what happened during the day and how they feel about it.
- Share your own experiences when you first started going to school so they know that you can understand them.

## 2. "My child is really excited to meet new friends, so they might get too close to their classmates."

Contrary to the first concern, some children are overly excited to meet new friends and join the class. I have noticed that some find it hard to be physically distanced from their classmates and teachers. Their excitement from playing with other kids makes them ignore their classmates' personal spaces – while many kids are still too shy to be around

others and get socially anxious easily. Personal space needs to be addressed both in school and at home.

What is personal space?

The author of *The Spaces Between Us*, neuroscientist Michael Graziano, describes personal space as a “buffer zone around the body” and our intangible “second skin,” which is hardwired into our DNA. Everyone needs their own personal space to feel comfortable and to function better, and this is learned at an early age.

Zones of personal space:

- Intimate: from 0 to 18 inches, a space for hugging and whispering
- Personal: 18 inches to 4 feet, a space for relationships with friends and relatives
- Social: 4 to 10 inches, a space for acquaintances

Children that stayed at home for a long time may not have the concept of personal space since they have been with their parents and families – and most family members love it when the child suddenly hugs or kisses them. There is a possibility that it will be harder for these kids to understand and establish personal space in the future. We speak about not knowing one's when a child does the following:

- Suddenly hugs their friend – while the friend might not like it
- Bumps their friends – without thinking how it makes them feel
- Cannot understand body language – such as their friend frowning when they borrowed a toy
- Takes toys from their friends while they're playing them
- Sits or stands too close to their friends

Before teaching personal space, make sure that your child is not suffering from hearing or vision difficulties that would explain why they sit too close to the teacher or friends.



This is what we can do to help children learn about personal space:

- Teach them body language. Help them understand the facial expressions of being annoyed, mad and confused signaling that they might have got too close to other kids. Discuss what other things people may do when their personal space is invaded: move or turn away, stop eye contact, freezes etc.
- Practice personal space at home. Act out different situations to help your child understand their own personal space and what physical distance is comfortable for them with different people.
- Make rules about getting closer to others, like asking before giving a hug.
- Teach kids what to say when their friends are intruding their personal zone. Rehearse with them responses like “Please, step away” or “I’m not comfortable with you sitting so close to me”, “I don’t like it when you suddenly hug me”.

Protecting and respecting personal space is an important social skill for children to learn to have a more successful interaction with their friends and to stay safe – especially now that COVID-19 is still around.



### 3. “She still does not know how to read and write, she might feel isolated since her classmates can read and write fast.”

Another common concern of a parent is how their child can cope with schoolwork and learning. It is fine if your child is not as advanced as the other kids, or if they were not able to practice much writing and reading at home – children come to school to learn. Some might get a cultural shock when they start practicing writing, they might be reluctant or even throw tantrums because they are not used to doing schoolwork. Some, however, are excited to learn.

How do you help children who are reluctant to learn?

- Understand that your child may be having anxiety and finding it really difficult to learn and follow the teacher. Observe your child’s reactions so that you and the school could help them better.
- Remember that every child is unique. Your child’s learning environment may be different from the others’ – some children can work better when they are fidgeting like tapping toes or sitting in a bouncy chair, and some may want to listen to music. You may ask your child what they prefer, and you can work on this with their teacher.
- Do not put too much pressure on your child. Some kids may have slow progress and that is okay. Do not encourage them to compete with others and help them understand that it is okay if they cannot keep up with their classmates.
- Encourage your child’s curiosity – see if they can do things on their own first, instead of giving the answer immediately. For example, when teaching your child how to read, do not just blurt out the word, but wait for your child to sound out each letter and read them – this helps them feel good about learning.
- Make learning fun. In our school, we always emphasize that learning is fun but can also be hard at times, and that when they find it harder it means that they have leveled up (just like in the games they play). Sometimes, it is good to turn learning into a game: for example by giving children tokens whenever they write well that can be used to get a prize afterwards.
- Talk to their teacher. Keeping an open communication with the teacher will be beneficial for your child. Let the teacher know what you have noticed and what they can do in school. The teachers are your child’s parents in school, and they want the best for their students – just like you do.

- Last but not least, offering your child some extra academic practice while at home might help them strengthen their skills and confidence. You're welcome to check out our vast collection of [free printable worksheets for kids](#) covering various topics from arithmetic and writing to life cycles and history. Or download one of our [learning apps for preschoolers and elementary students](#) and get even more diverse and interactive practice!

#### 4. "My child is not used to the new routine, and it is hard to wake him up in the morning for school."

Disruption of children's routine may cause them anxiety. They were not used to waking up early – and now they have to do regular face-to-face classes. Psychologist Rachel Busman observed that "kids are saying things like, 'I do not want to go back to school,' or 'I don't want to be away from you.'" Children got used to having you around and not being able to do school with you is a dramatic change in their routine.

It is important to understand that changes in your child's routine affect their behavior: they may get grumpy and defiant. Parents should help their children transition to a new routine by making a schedule and warning them about the coming changes. You may use visual cues like a picture of a kid waking up, getting ready for school and going to school – to help them imagine what their schedule will be like. Give them time to adjust for a week before starting the new routine.

This transition is not easy for both parents and children, and that is quite typical and normal. You as a parent might be afraid that it will turn into a struggle for you, but remember how everyone eventually managed to switch to online classes. The return to offline schooling will also be manageable if parents, teachers, and the schools work together to provide what is best for the children. And while your kids are adapting to the post-pandemic face-to-face classroom, [Kids Academy](#) is always there with tons of edutainment activities, didactic materials and a [blog](#) on children's development and education.

#### References:

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