



Live Well, Work Well

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PRIORITIZING WELLNESS DURING THE 2022-23 SCHOOL YEAR

Many may be excited for school to start after a long summer. However, the new school year can come with new and recurring challenges. The 2022-23 school landscape looks different from previous years during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mask mandates are on the retreat, with many schools ending preventive measures such as quarantines and regular screening tests. Additionally, COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are available to school-aged children.

Although the school year seems to be back to normal, caregivers, parents and children will likely still face uncertainty, stress and other emotions. The return to school and its associated routine can impact everyone differently; therefore, it's worth taking a proactive approach to approaching wellness during this transition.

This article explores ways to care for yourself and your children during the school year.

Checking In With Children

Although schools, playgrounds and lunchrooms may seem more normal this school year, children may experience stress and uncertainty. Children may even engage in more social situations than in previous years during the pandemic, which can create different environments.

As such, you should monitor your children for signs of anxiety or distress. Be on the lookout for changes in a child's behavior and mood or physical symptoms, such as:

- Increased defiance or irritability
- Disturbances in sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Less energy
- Sadness or crying
- Nausea, muscle tension or dizziness
- Refusal to go to school or engage in virtual schoolwork

If a child or others in the home shows any of these signs, they may have anxiety about their schooling situation. Children are resilient, but it's still important to pay attention to signs of anxiety—and seek professional support if any warning signs persist.

Taking Care of Yourself

With school back in session, here are some healthy ways for working parents and caregivers to make the school year more manageable and balance their work and personal responsibilities:



- **Set reasonable expectations.** Establish realistic expectations about what you think you can accomplish each day or week. Don't be hard on yourself. Cut yourself some slack and focus on completing high-impact items and responsibilities.
- **Develop a schedule.** Creating a routine that works around your work schedule and family needs is essential. Additionally, consider consolidating certain activities such as housework, chores or extracurricular activities to one or two specific days to help everyone stay focused.
- **Set boundaries.** If you feel stretched thin between being a good caregiver and an efficient employee, it may be helpful to set some boundaries. Remember that you're in control of how you're expending your energy and can free up mental space to allow yourself to be more present where and when it matters.
- **Create healthy habits.** Be sure to get plenty of sleep and eat well so you can be fully charged to take on the day. It's also important to stay active and incorporate movement into your daily routine. It may help to schedule a workout first thing in the morning, during lunch or in the late afternoon so it will fit in around school.
- **Make good use of weekends.** If school and work both happen on weekdays, be sure to use the weekends to recharge, reduce stress and have fun as a family. If you prefer alone time, make that a priority. Everyone needs a break from responsibilities, whether that's work or school.
- **Ask for help.** Lean on your networks for support if you need help getting through the workdays. With many extracurriculars and school programs back, don't wait to ask others for help if you're overwhelmed. Be honest and communicative with your family and co-workers if the current situation isn't working well.

It's also important to recognize your unhealthy coping methods and find alternatives such as meditating, exercising or talking with a friend.

Conclusion

Although school is back in session and starting to resemble the pre-pandemic days, caregivers and parents may still seem stretched thin balancing caregiving and working. Children may also feel overwhelmed with school and social aspects. You can explore healthy ways to cope with lingering uncertainty and make balancing all your personal and professional responsibilities manageable.

If you're feeling stressed or experiencing burnout related to kids returning to school, talk to your manager about your situation and to learn more about employer-offered resources.

Additionally, talk to your doctor or a licensed mental health professional if you're concerned about your or your child's mental health.