On Your Mind, September-October, 2020

**Birthday-School During Pandemic Themes**

**Jonathan C. Robinson, Ph.D.**

**Contributing Columnist**

Dear Dr. Robinson,

Megan, my precious 6 year old daughter, is having a birthday in a few weeks. In normal times, her first grade teacher holds a birthday party in class for each of the birthday children as their special day approaches. This year, with social distancing and all the other cautions to safeguard during a pandemic, there will be no birthday party at school. Poor Megan is sad and confused. Any thoughts?

Signed, Heart Goes Out to Megan

Dear Heart,

Such are our times. My heart goes out to your little girl as well. Even having an at-home birthday party is iffy. I know Megan misses special times with all of her friends. Although it is confusing for many of us, we are all in this together. We are all either part of the problem or part of the solution. What a great time to teach Megan the blessing of giving to others.

First, if you haven’t already, give Mandy the 6 year old version of what’s going on, why the safeguards, and how we can all pitch in and do our parts. Be sure to active listen her frustration and impatience and questions about why all the fuss.

Then, brainstorm creative ways to make her birthday special to her. Do you have the capacity to zoom online? She could get six or eight of her friends online at the same time on zoom. You could even have virtual present opening and blowing out the candles on her birthday cake. Talk with the parents of her friends to coordinate a silly birthday dance online in her honor. After the zoom call, you could create a scavenger hunt in your home with clues for her to find each of her birthday presents in the house. Of course, make it a special family birthday party with all of you who share living space, maybe inviting her teacher by zoom for a little while. Hope these are helpful hints. Blessings, Dr. Robinson

Dear Dr. Robinson,

Our whole world is turned upside down with this pandemic, what with masking, social distancing, hand-washing, and stay-at-home requests. I’ve lost my job in the service industry, while my husband, thankfully, can work his job from home. Our two kids, however, ages 10 and 12, are driving us nuts! How can we stay sane, find work, do our jobs, and home-school our kids until in-school classes start again?

Signed, Going Bonkers

Dear GB,

I hear you. All we can do is all we can do. I don’t mean to placate you, but I feel confident you are adapting the best you can. With household income taking a hit, I imagine there’s a little panic thrown in there for good measure. Thankfully, your kids are old enough to take some responsibility for their homeschooling.

Start with a family meeting to lay out the circumstances, active listen stress, and brainstorm duties, chores, and activities. With a written plan of attack for these times, families are less likely to implode.

Remember to balance self-care with other-care. Me time is essential for you and for each of your family members. Also, plan fun activities as reward for completing chores and school work. Get exercise each day, while also maintaining safeguards. Stress management ranks right up there with sleeping, eating, and interacting.

Also, physical spacing and dedicated time are important to get all the tasks completed daily. Use a dry erase calendar if possible, to allocate time and to plan ahead. Plan something fun for the family as a whole on a weekly basis and put that on the calendar as well. When things seem hopeless, it’s important to have something to look forward to.

Each of the four of you needs to create personal work space and time separate for yourselves. For example, you job hunt online at the kitchen table. Each of your kids has a schoolwork desk and computer in their bedrooms. Hubby settles in to the home office to do his job remotely.

Check in with each child at the beginning of their school day and help them make a plan for that day. Set the timer in the kitchen hourly to monitor their progress on their school work. In most homeschool situations, a six-hour school day can be contracted into three or four hours, of course with hourly ten-minute breaks for gaming and snacks.

This kind of format will help all of you survive the circumstances and each other during these hard times. Stay in touch with your social network through skipe or zoom. Get a good, physical workout daily online to sweat your stress out, and maybe a zoom meditation/yoga class to clear your brain out. Hang in there. Stay in touch.

Blessings, Dr. Robinson