



The Pandemic and Kids' Mental Health

Talking About Your Family's Safety Rules

Jeanne Blake: As children are going back to school, back into social situations where they're having more contact with peers, some children have expressed feeling anxious about this. Some adults are anxious about it. But each family will have a different set of rules, and that can complicate things for young people. So how do you encourage parents to talk about that with their children?

Dr. Paula K. Rauch: I remind parents that we all had different rule sets before covid entered the picture. We've had different rule sets that have varied family to family about what it means to be safe during the pandemic. And as covid numbers improve and slowly, slowly, slowly, we come out of this pandemic, during that transition time and beyond, we'll continue to have different rule sets. Talking about what it means to be safe in your family -- and how you make those decisions for your family -- are important teachable moments.

It's helpful if parents can talk about safety measures that children recognize. One example is to say, "We wear seatbelts in the car and bike helmets when we ride our bikes. It's not because every time we go out in the car, we're in a car accident, or every time we get on our bike, we hit our head. But this is a way that we choose to be a little bit safer."

I am saying that because when kids go back to school and see that they are required to wear masks, some children will read the wearing of masks as, "I'm not in a safe place, school is not a safe place." And what I want parents to help them with, is to say, in fact, "Wearing a mask at school is a safety measure that we're taking now, just like we do seatbelts and bike helmets." And there are other experiences your child will recognize. Some parents let their children ride on scooters or rollerblade, whatever they're wearing. And other parents say knee pads, wrist guards and helmets, for example. Parents love their children and the degree of safety in what they put in place varies. Many kids who are the knee guard and elbow pad wearers will say to a parent, "Why do I have to? This other person doesn't." Parents have to explain why they are making the rules they make. And they will need to do the same as we enter this transition phase where there will be fewer restrictions, but not zero restrictions. Ideally as parents, it's an opportunity not to be angry at the parents who don't have the same safety rules as we do, but rather an opportunity to talk with our children about our thought process around Covid, and beyond Covid, to opportunities and challenges kids will have in the future.

This interview was edited for brevity

Jeanne Blake, Blake Works CEO and creator of *The Pandemic and Kids' Mental Health*, is a leadership communication coach, author and award-winning science and medical television journalist.

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