



## The Pandemic and Kids' Mental Health

### *A Teacher's Perspective*

**Alicia Mezzoni:** My name is Alicia Mezzoni. I teach fifth grade at the Greenmont Avenue School in Dracut Massachusetts.

**Alicia:** The last year for everyone was very overwhelming. I hope as a society, and me as a teacher, we don't just jump back into the way things were before the pandemic. I think we need to take some of the lessons we learned and slowly go back into it. Sometimes as a teacher, you just jump into it, and you're like, Oh, we need to do this, and they need to learn this. I hope as an educational culture we can slowly dive back in.

**Jeanne Blake:** Why do you think that's so important?

**Alicia:** Because the kids have been through so many changes this year. Teachers have been through so many changes this year. But it's especially tough for kids. I don't think they realize how many changes they've been through. And they've done it. They're resilient. But I noticed those changes even with my own kids. When everyone came back full in-person in April they were exhausted. They were cranky. It was just the change. We need to ease them back into those changes.

**Jeanne:** Tell me a little bit about the “calm” and “sharing” you implemented.

**Alicia:** Every morning in our classroom we would come in, do morning work, and then every student would have the opportunity to share. They would share something or pass. It could be how they were feeling, whether they had a soccer game, whether they saw their cousin. It just gave them the opportunity to share what was on their mind, get out something they were feeling, and have the class get to know them a little bit better. We did that every day.

**Jeanne:** Why do you think it's so important to maintain that in the coming year?

**Alicia:** I feel like I knew them better than any other class previous to this because we were able to slow down. And I'm seeing them at home. I got to see their pets, their bedrooms, and their grandparents walking in the background. It's really important to take time to let them show you who they are – what's important to them. It was nice to be like, oh, this person has a pet named Jazz, or this person loves carrot cake and they made one with their mom last night. It's important to know those details to connect with them. And then you can use those things to motivate them, too.

**Jeanne:** How can parents support teachers? What do you hope for?

**Alicia:** Just be nice. Teachers are doing everything that they're doing – I can only speak for myself – because we care about your kids. We're doing it because we want to help them. When I have conversations with parents, I try to remember that not everyone's family is the same. There are parents who don't get home until very late at night and they don't have time. I try to remember family dynamics. So, I hope parents will give the same courtesy – that we're trying to do the best we can for their kids.

*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.**