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**Questions About Whether Kids Should Return to In-Person School**

*“[When schools went virtual] parents had to figure out how to set up a classroom in their living room, locate a log-in name and password that might have been sent to them at the beginning of the year (and might be different for every class), and plan a schedule that would include some online learning and some time when their children would be working independently from home. (Based on everything we now know, we should perhaps put both “working” and “independently” in quotation marks.)*

*“The logistical challenges—even for families with devices and connectivity—were daunting. Who got access to the computer when? What took priority if Mom had a Zoom call at 10:00 and that was the time when Mrs. Jackson was teaching a math lesson? Those challenges didn’t begin to touch on the learning that was supposed to be taking place, with parents spending hours on Google figuring out how to impart at least some information about everything from state capitals to solving for X.”*

* *From 81 Questions for Parents: Helping Your Kids Succeed in School*

If your Facebook and Instagram pages are like mine, there are daily reminders that kids are actually heading (or at least inching) back to in-person schooling.

And for most parents I know, that’s a cause for huge celebration. As I learned when I was writing *81 Questions for Parents,* virtual schooling was difficult for some families and nearly impossible for others.

So a return to something like normalcy, even if it is only in-person schooling for two or three days a week, is cause for celebration in a lot of households.

But there are some kids who are not that thrilled about returning to school. Could yours be one of them? Here are 3 questions parents should ask:

**How much did your child learn during the time they were at home?**

Some kids just did better when school went virtual. They could learn at their own pace. Without the pressure of appearing “dumb” to other students, they could ask their teacher a question in the chat function. If they didn’t grasp a difficult concept the first time, they could rewatch a lesson on video.

Other kids struggled from the get-go. We now know that some students may return to school a full year behind where they might otherwise have expected to be. (This doesn’t mean they can’t catch up. But it does mean they will face challenges.)

If you don’t know whether your child is on track or not, check out these [Family Guides](https://seekcommonground.org/family-guides) developed by the nonprofit Seek Common Ground. They will give you at least a basic sense of whether your child will enter fourth grade ready to read and do math on the fourth grade level. Bottom line: if your kid is way behind where you think they should be, is in-person school or home learning a better way to catch up?

**How did online learning go for YOU?**

Ask any parent who tried to combine working at home with getting kids signed on to their virtual learning and finding ways to occupy them when they weren’t in class . . . not to mention teaching fractions or Spanish verb conjugations on the side. As tough as virtual school was for kids, it was also very hard for parents.

The past year has been particularly hard on women in the workforce. Last February, when the pandemic began to take a toll on employment, the jobless rates of men and women were nearly equal. But since then, there has been a dramatic divergence.

In September, when this school year began (and it became clear that online schooling was likely to be a reality for some time, roughly 1.1 million people left the workforce. And **80 percent** of them were women. In December, women accounted for *all* the net job losses in the economy.

So a decision about whether your child will return to in-person schooling has to take your whole family into account. Is it possible for both parents to work if kids need help and supervision with their schooling? Can work hours be juggled so one parent is always available for school help and support (because honestly, that’s what it takes for most kids). Can the family afford to have one partner leave the workforce until kids return to in-person school?

**How well does your child deal with the social pressures of school?**

There are some students who are just overwhelmed by the social pressures of school. These are the students – often shy or highly creative or somehow out of the norm - whose biggest challenge is not the class work, but just dealing with other kids. It’s hard to concentrate on algebra if you’re worked that other students are going to make fun of you in the hallway when the bell rings. ASK your child how learning at home has compared with learning at school. Do not expect a kid to say, “You know, the other kids make fun of me,” but listen for what they *don’t* say. If they seem to be dreading a return to school, think about whether it’s better to keep them home for a while longer.

It’s hard to decide whether a return to in-person learning will help or hurt your child. Take an honest look at how virtual schooling has gone. Many students will need and want a return to their school building. But for others, perhaps sticking with the online option might be a better option. Make the choice that’s best for your child.