

## September Newsletter



### Back to School During COVID-19

This month, Dr. Mazius sat down to discuss ways parents can handle this year's unique conundrum of back-to-school on [NSC's YouTube channel \(Click Here\)](#). We invite you to check it out!

The sudden changes that this pandemic imposed on everyone have left many young people uncertain about the future of their education and parents with hard decisions to make. This year the transition into a new school year will be completely different. Everyone will have different emotional responses during this transition to a new school schedule and Dr.

Elliot Broch can help answer some of these challenging questions while giving expert advice.

Dr. Elliot Broch is a licensed psychologist with a specialty in School Psychology. Dr. Broch works with children and adolescents who are experiencing social skills deficits, difficulties with executive functioning/planning, learning disabilities, and symptoms of defiance and aggression. He also specializes in working with children and adolescents with Autism, ADHD, and anxiety. In addition, Dr. Broch is experienced in therapeutic interventions and counseling, consultations with parents and teachers, and psychological evaluations.

### Dr. Broch's Advice for The Fall

The COVID-19 pandemic is a nationwide trauma. For children, it has changed and affected multiple aspects of their lives. One major consequence of this pandemic is the changes it is making to Fall 2020. Some schools are going online-only, some are planning to return to in-person instruction with people in masks and socially distanced, and some are a combination of remote and in-class learning. How to prepare for the unpredictable, and not knowing what types of outcomes will result from this wacky school year are common concerns for many parents and teachers. These topics and other important back to school questions are discussed below.

1. [How can parents and students prepare for this unpredictable school year?](#)

Despite the unknown future of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools are preparing their staff and students for a safe return to school. Both schools and families are concerned about heading into this unpredictable year. No one knows how the year will play out, and the lack of expectation leaves people unprepared and nervous. Although heading back to school may be anxiety-provoking, Dr. Broch finds it important for parents to stay positive, keep an open mind about the new school year, and encourage their children to do the same. Entering the school year with a level head, and reframing the nerve-racking situation into a positive learning experience can give families the strength they need to make it through the Fall. According to Dr. Broch, an important part of the coping process is not what happens to us, but what we tell ourselves. In addition, education is more than processing and assimilating information. Cultivating grit, an ability to adapt and demonstrate empathy towards others may be the most important skills that students can learn. COVID-19 provides us with that opportunity.

2. How can teachers prepare for this unpredictable school year?

Dr. Broch encourages teachers to see this year as a chance for self-growth and growth for their students. He recommends two resources to help teachers promote a growth mindset within their students and themselves. First, in the classroom, teachers can use *The Mindset Kit* (<https://www.mindsetkit.org/topics/about-growth-mindset>). Second, for themselves, teachers can use *The Self-management Tool Kit* (<https://www.transformingeducation.org/self-management-toolkit/>). Also, it is important for teachers to continue teaching with flexibility and kindness. It is also necessary for teachers to continue helping their students reach their potential. It is critical that school professionals do not assume anything during this new time. Students may want to go back to school, they may want homework to keep busy, they want to learn, and they want to feel normal again. Therefore, teachers can help their students by keeping school as normal as possible. Teachers can also ask their kids for direct feedback. Again, it is important not to assume something is or isn't working. Therefore, teachers can avoid assumptions and fix problems based on what their students report does or doesn't work. Dr. Broch also suggests that schools can create a check in system between staff and students. Each staff member is assigned a small number of students that they are responsible for calling and checking-in with. The staff member would be responsible for making sure students are on task, turning in work, and doing well emotionally. Finally, Dr. Broch encourages schools to pull their staff members together and form a "mental health team." This team of staff would be responsible for helping the students that need more educational help and/or social advice.

3. Will children/adolescents' mental health be affected by COVID-19 and the way it is changing how they used to attend school?

"We cannot assume anything!" Dr. Broch strongly suggests that parents and teachers should not assume their children and students will be negatively affected by the pandemic. Yes, COVID-19 is a trauma that affects children nationwide. However, much like those who were affected by the nationwide trauma of 9/11, the way each child responds and experiences trauma depends on their individual temperaments, the quality of their support systems, and the environment they are living in. Most children are resilient and will find a new normal despite the craziness of this pandemic. In all, Dr. Broch does not foresee the changes to school because of COVID-19 resulting in long-term consequences for all children. How children cope and how they get through this year will depend on the attitudes of their role models (i.e. parents and teachers) and the level of exposure they have personally experienced (i.e. whether they have lost family or friends to the virus). Therefore, Dr. Broch encourages parents and teachers to keep positive about the upcoming year and the rest of this pandemic. It is also recommended that schools proactively create a tiered support system for staff and students in which those in need of mental health services can access it. For example, creating a school wide buddy system between staff members to provide extra support and comradery could help adults cope better. In addition, creating a mentor/buddy system between staff and students could enable all students to have an adult who is checking in on them and also ensure that those who are struggling can access more comprehensive help.

4. Virtual Versus In-Person: Do students learn better in-class or online?

Educationally, Dr. Broch finds that the average student learns better from in-person instruction. However, this depends on a variety of factors. Dr. Broch finds that younger children may need in-person schooling more than adolescents and young adults. It may be especially difficult for a teacher of someone in K4 and K5 to establish a relationship with the kiddo, keep them engaged, and teach them. However, for adolescents and young adults, their success online depends on the training, preparation, and work of the institution that is providing the online schooling. If the school has designed the program well, then the education can be effective. Success in remote learning programs also depends on the individual's motivation, their parent's ability to keep them on task, and the environment around them. Unfortunately, online learning is not the best option educationally, but people can learn relatively well from virtual programs. It is up to parents and teachers to keep positive and keep children motivated to learn.

5. Virtual Versus In-Person: Do children and adolescents experience more mental-health benefits from attending school in-person?

According to Dr. Broch, there are mental health benefits that result from attending school in person as opposed to online. Mainly, these benefits are due to the social nature of being in-class and around peers and other humans. Dr. Broch states that humans are social creatures. They crave human to human interaction that will never be replaced by video chat or phone call. Attending school in-person will allow kids to see their friends, hear their voices, and have the chance to engage in normal social interactions again. It will also help them get reintegrated into a classroom setting, and remember what it was like to be a part of a large group. No matter how advanced technology gets, it cannot replace social interaction nor satisfy our human need for it.

## Wrapping it up

Because of the pandemic, parents are left with difficult decisions during this back to school season. Being prepared can help ease not only the parent's mind but the children's mind as well, giving a sense of comfort over an ever so changing school year ahead. Returning to school, whether it's in person or virtual, during this pandemic may not feel like normal – at least for a while. But having safety plans – and making sure schools have the resources needed to follow them – can help protect students, teachers, staff, and families. Lastly, we invite our readers to [Subscribe to NSC on YouTube](#) for more meaningful insight on this topic and many others. Also, look for North Shore Center in the News: Director Dr. Mazius with [Today](#).

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