

What the Pandemic Can Teach Us about Parenting and Practicing Authentically

Lessons to help forge your path as pre-pandemic life resumes.

By Emily Wessel Farr

Who didn't feel a bit overwhelmed when, Friday the 13th of March 2020, the world stopped, and uncertainty gripped us? The pandemic continues. Sadly, the world has suffered a loss of life that is hard to process. But there is good news. Vaccines are here. Vaccination rates are increasing. Life is resuming. Yet, many of us are still overwhelmed in a way that far exceeds any bad day in the pre-pandemic years. Additionally, some (perhaps many) of us have suffered a trauma that needs careful nurturing and intentional work. For those of us who are parents, we are also worried about the well-being of our children, who are seemingly resilient but also affected daily by the pandemic's effects, least of which is their ability to socialize normally.

It's been almost two years. What have we learned? *What can we learn?*

Embrace Your Identity

Back in 2019, or what I now fondly call "The Talking Days," I loved to entertain. I loved having a party, a playdate, a picnic, a baseball outing, or a dinner out. I loved sitting at coffee shops just to listen to the conversation around me. I loved people watching back when people were around. I loved watching standup comedy, in person, and I think I have since seen every "special" on Netflix. I loved seeing my colleagues. I enjoyed stopping by their offices to chat, get some advice, or find out what's for lunch.

After all, I'm an ENFJ in the [Myers-Briggs type indicator](#) (a person with the extraverted, intuitive, feeling, and judgment personality traits). For you Myers-Briggs fans, you know that means that I make plans to have you over for drinks. If we end up talking about our feelings, even better! I crave and cherish friendship, especially my female friendships. As Madeleine Albright so famously noted, there's a special place in hell for women who don't support other women. I'm not sure I believe in hell, but I sure as hell believe in Madeleine.

The pandemic taught me that I'm a better mom when I have my own, distinct life as a professional. Forced to be home for many months, I realized just how much I miss the office. Now I don't necessarily want to be in the office five days a week or when I'm closing my door to research a motion. I doubt many of us will be commuting Monday-Friday anytime soon. Yet, I am a better version of myself when I am with other adults, bouncing off ideas and learning about their hobbies, families, and weekend plans. I have gained a greater appreciation for that part of my personality that needs to get out of the house and onto the train. It makes me a happier person and therefore a more productive, happier attorney.

Gain Efficiency

As the saying goes, if you want something done, ask a busy person. We lawyers are busy. We are also organized. When the pandemic hit, whether we knew it or not, we started to prioritize. Little by little, things that used to be “deal breakers” became nice-to-haves. That’s what happens when you enter crisis mode: The essentials reveal themselves.

Back in 2019, I was busy, but not like I am now. I didn’t have to juggle a busy caseload with a child’s e-learning or a symptom that leads to a call that leads to a day or two of quarantine and a test to rule out a highly infectious disease (you get it). As a litigator mom, I always kept the discovery cutoff date in the same, tidy list that contained groceries, birthday parties, camp registration, and my best friend’s kid’s birthday. Today that list is bursting at the seams. Back in 2019, I could (sometimes) remember that it was cold enough for my kid to wear a winter hat, or rainy enough to break out the boots, but laundering masks and taking temperatures are a challenge.

The pandemic taught me how to prioritize quickly and effectively in my practice. As parents, we never know if tomorrow will bring a days-long shutdown that turns our offices into a work-from-home school situation. By prioritizing, we don’t just “go through the motions.” Rather, we hit the high notes.

Keep Perspective

Don’t apologize if you need to exercise at lunch. Over the past 20 months, you might have grown accustomed to a more flexible work arrangement, and that’s not a bad thing. For those of us lucky to have some flexibility, we should take advantage of that privilege. You now have a new perspective: The work isn’t going anywhere. Your laptop will be there when you get back from that walk (and your phone went with you).

Conversely, don’t complain about the smallest annoyances. Sure, life can be difficult. And if you are a privileged mom, gainfully employed with health insurance and a 401K, you are still allowed to complain from time to time. However, what has the pandemic’s toll taught you about life? Hint: It’s precious. A little bit of gratitude goes a long way. If you try to overshadow temporary moments of self-doubt, stress, and panic with your enduring gratitude that you are alive and well, you will have gained perspective and you will be happier.

Find the Joy

Finally, the pandemic has brought a lot of stress to our lives, but there have been a couple bright spots. Friends, family, and colleagues have reported moments that they have enjoyed, including regular breakfasts with their teenager, morning drives with their toddler, lunchtime walks with their spouse, and a healthier sleep and exercise schedule. When it’s all over, and this new world looks more like the old one, don’t forget about the joy you found during a strange, dark time. Even better: Don’t let it go.

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