

#SELChat: Reframing "The COVID Slide"

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There is a great deal of concern over what is being called COVID Slide. COVID Slide is defined as the learning loss that students have experienced due to the abrupt end of school in Spring 2020 and the blended learning approach for Fall 2020. Although I understand the concern, I wonder what power and opportunity we can find in reframing these circumstances.

I learned about reframing when I was on staff at Vanderbilt University several years ago. My education did not come from research or from on-the-job training. Instead, it came from a treasured relationship that developed between me and my colleague. She was nearing retirement and seized every moment possible to talk with me about my children, my past, my present, my work, my goals. She cared about me as a person, and she wasn't afraid to let me know that. Because of our mutual respect and admiration for one another, a bond of trust was created between us.

During this period of my life, my daughter was in middle school. Like many middle school girls, she was sassy. More than once, I came to the office seeking Miss Bee's wisdom about how to handle the situation with my teenager. One day Miss Bee could tell that something was bothering me, and she gently inquired. After I shared my lament, she asked, "Now how can you reframe that?"

I looked at her puzzled. My expression saying all that needed to be said.

"Yes, how can you look at that another way so you are not giving up your power?"

I was perplexed.

"What can you learn from this situation that can make you stronger and wiser? What can you carry with you from this?", she continued.

This is the art of reframing. I call it an art because it requires practice. And cognitive reframing is a technique used in therapy to help clients see situations in new ways. It helps us take back our power.

There is much that the pandemic has stolen from us – loved ones, holidays, celebrations, jobs, peace of mind – to name a few. But what has this global phenomenon taught us and our children?

When I hear someone complain about learning loss or see a headline about COVID Slide, I feel frustrated. My mind is filled with questions: Why are we placing our children in the victim seat? A slide according to what standards? Are these standards valid for the 21st century? Is school, as we know it, relevant to life today? How can we change and improve education? How can we better serve the needs of the whole family?

Yes, COVID has been a huge upset for all of us, but we are still here. Why? Because we are resilient! Resilience is the ability to bounce back despite adversity. Celebrating our strength is the first step to regaining our power.

Here are some of the invaluable lessons I believe our children are learning during this unprecedented time:

1. ***Be adaptable.*** – The best made plans can change, and we must be flexible.

2. ***Spending time with family is fun.*** – Instead of the hustle and bustle of commuting, family life is now centered at home. How much have parents and children gotten to know each other better with this extra time together?

3. ***Being outdoors is good for the soul.*** – I have seen more kids outside playing basketball with their fathers, taking walks with their mothers, and riding bikes with their siblings

than I have since I was a kid. I've seen entire driveways full of chalk drawings and yard signs with encouraging words for passersby. It has been a return to childhood.

4. Solving big problems requires everyone's cooperation. – Slowing the spread of the virus demanded us to quarantine, abandon large gatherings, and wear masks. When we have heeded those directives we have kept people safe and healthy.

5. Screens are tools, not replacements for people. – Play dates in real life with friends wins over video play dates. Learning in a classroom of students with a teacher provides a rich experience. I know students who have been more excited than ever to return to the classroom, masks and all.

For us as adults, what have we learned from this experience about our educational system – what's working and what's not working? Or about our society – how do we ensure equitable learning opportunities and food distribution?

If we reframe the events of the past six months, I believe we can see that there are challenges that have come to light that were long buried in the busyness of "normal life". I, for one, don't want to go back to that. Let's find a better way together.

Author

Tamara Fyke is an educator and creative entrepreneur with a passion for kids, families, and urban communities. She is the creator, author, and brand manager for [Love In A Big World](#), which equips K-8 educators with a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum that is both research-based and practical, and also provides the supporting resources necessary to empower students to be socially competent, emotionally healthy problem-solvers who discover and maintain a sense of purpose and make a positive difference in the world.

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