

NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST

Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner

VBS Camp: What to Do Midst COVID 19 – Take 2 Led by Lynne Pabst June 3rd 9-10:30am

If you find yourself stuck in the waiting room because I cannot talk and watch the waiting room at the same time, text 570-850-2844.

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Grief and Anxiety At Re-Entry

While none of us are saddened by the hope of a return to freedom going yellow or green provides, this brings a whole new set of stressors. Even though comedians made fun of what is learned about a person when forced to be quarantined with them and even in an earlier article, I cautioned people to be patient with and forgiving to one another while living in very close confinement, the truth is we developed some new habits and became comfortable with a new way of life which once more is being interrupted. Children got accustomed to being with parents 24/7. Parents reconnected with children. Couples rediscovered one another. Neighbors got used to seeing people in the yards around them. We started gardens which now need tending. Pets were spoiled by extra walks and attention. In fact, reports say pet adoption increased during the pandemic. We got used to working from home and meeting on Zoom. We secretly enjoyed having more control over our schedules rather than being dictated by traffic, travel times, extracurricular schedules, and school and work schedules. We were spoiled by being able to turn microphone and video off during meetings to deal with a family matter or to multitask. Casual dress became the norm. One person I spoke with recently said she had not been out of her house for 2 ½ months.

As the world re-opens we face change yet again with people returning to individual lives and the outside world. This causes new stressors, anxiety and grief. Are people going to continue to follow social distancing and the wearing of masks as they should? Will there be a second wave of the virus? Parents worry is the childcare or workplace really following the safety precautions outlined? The young child needs to separate again from home and family and adjust to childcare workers and environment. Couples again need to kiss good-bye in the morning and

trust faithfulness till they return in the evening. What about that person who built a fortress around self for 2 ½ months? What fears are faced in returning to the outside world? Oh, and those pets. Do not be surprised by some unusual behaviors or presents left for you because they are now alone all day. Will the shelters be overwhelmed in 2 months by pets which no longer fit into people's lives? Will there be time to weed that garden? At the risk of sounding a bit pessimistic, it is not going to be any easier to re-enter than it was to withdraw. We will stress over the changes, be anxious over the outcomes and grieve the loss of what we had during quarantine. The good news is that we will again adjust because God made us flexible and walks with us through our daily challenges.

As a Christian Educator, of course, my main concern is support of children in this process. For almost 3 months, parents, media, community, teachers have been telling them:

- home is the safest place
- you could get sick
- you could make someone else sick
- COVID 19 kills

Even if we tried to protect them, they have certainly gotten these messages loud and clear. As they move out into the world again, there will be fears of getting sick or making someone else sick. Possibly feelings of guilt, if they hear that a friend they just played with has gotten sick (even if not from COVID 19), thinking they made them sick because they played with them.

Here are some specifics to consider with helps for adjusting to our "new new-normal".

Make the decision which is right for your family (church) and respect the decisions of other families (churches) –

- ❖ Some families (churches) may decide to quarantine longer due to vulnerability or simple caution.
- ❖ Some families (churches) may decide they are able to get back into the world.
- ❖ Some families may have no choice but to move beyond home because parents' places of work have reopened.
- ❖ Faith communities need to be respectful of these decisions and be prepared to support both situations. Just because the church decides to re-open worship does not mean all families will be attending. Continue to offer a variety of worship and spiritual growth experiences delivered in multiple ways.

Re-enter slowly –

- ❖ Take time to reacquaint with childcare and school/work staff.
- ❖ Ease children back into childcare by starting with less time and working up to full-time.
- ❖ Do not expect that 3-year-old to go running into their childcare provider's arms as they did pre-COVID 19. (Some may, some may not. Remember they have been taught through COVID 19 to social distance and should still be distancing.)
- ❖ Do not expect that 5-year-old to leave parent running joyfully into class. (Some may and some may not. Remember they have been taught through COVID 19 that the safest place is home and they have been with parents 24/7.)
- ❖ Expect clinginess and even tears in parting once again.

- ❖ Look into easing back into the workplace.
- ❖ Take note that probably during this pandemic, children have been having more screen time than most professionals would desire whether due to staying connected with school/church/friends/activities or because parents while working needed to have children occupied. Be prepared for some battles as screen time is reduced. Again, key here is slowly. Reduce the time by small increments until back to the favored amount.
- ❖ Restart church activities slowly and in phases.

Prepare for the change –

- ❖ Talk about it as a family and as a community of faith.
- ❖ Make the plan together.
- ❖ Define what will change but reassure with what will stay the same.
- ❖ Send picture of pastor, childcare worker, organist etc. with mask on to the home.
- ❖ Prepare the child for the fact that their favorite friend or teacher may not be in class because of regrouping or because those individuals have chosen not to return feeling it not safe yet.
- ❖ Do not be surprised if you see older children exhibiting separation anxiety, stranger anxiety or even guilt. (Do not be surprised if you have those feelings too.)
- ❖ Take time to talk about feelings of fear or anxiety.
- ❖ Prepare young children that friends and caregivers may not offer hugs or lap time as much as before.
- ❖ Explain to children what changes there will be when returning to church or childcare or school.
- ❖ Explain to children the new rules for worship your church has put in place.
- ❖ Plan for continued care of those new pets or gardens.

Maintain some of those New-Found Family Traditions you started during COVID 19 –

- ❖ Decide as a family what traditions you want to hold on to and figure out how to do so.
- ❖ Define as church leadership what good practices came out of this pandemic and should be kept.

Communicate the Love of God and Presence of the Holy Spirit –

- ❖ Tell those stories of comfort and God's presence
- ❖ Emphasize God's steadfast love.
- ❖ Sing those songs of assurance (I think of "Be Still and Know".).
- ❖ Spend time in prayer.
- ❖ Remind children of the presence of God's love and the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Respond to feelings and decisions with love, compassion, and respect.
- ❖ Explain continued use of masks and distancing as care for your neighbor.
- ❖ Pray for guidance and wisdom in making decisions regarding re-entry.

I continue to pray for you, your churches, and your families as we navigate a new wilderness.

Blessings -- Safe Re-entry – Remember take it slowly.

Helpful Resources:

Re-opening Children's Ministry: <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/childrens-ministry-after-covid19>

Free Posters and Helps for Reopening Children's Ministry: <https://www.lifeway.com/en/special-emphasis/6-considerations-for-reopening-your-kids-ministry>