



“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.”
 — Dr. Seuss

Back to School During a Pandemic Milestone Moment

Beginning this school year will present both excitement and understandable anxiety about a new year of learning and the unique circumstances because of classes meeting online in many places. These feelings impact both student and parent/guardian. Extended family and friends can support students this year with the Back to School During a Pandemic Milestone Moment. This Moment provides desired outcomes, suggestions, and a discussion guide to use for both online and face to face conversations, prayer, and support for the beginning of a new school year.

Desired Outcomes:

- Provide a discussion guide for faith-filled conversations to have in the home and online with a child or youth with their parent(s)/guardian(s) and other family and friends.
- Spend time listening to one another tell of joys and challenges as a new school year begins.
- Feel encouraged and supported to know that you are not alone as you begin school.
- Experience prayers and blessings from family and friends that provide a memorable moment for the student(s) and parent(s)/guardian(s).

Suggestions:

- Invite grandparents, classmates, and other family members and friends either online (Zoom, Google, etc.) or face to face to engage in conversations using the Discussion Guide while honoring social distancing and restrictions.
- Consider an outdoor setting to meet and social distance with family, friends, and classmates.
- Follow up this time together with a virtual sleepover for the students and friends where they can play games online, watch movies online, and talk online until bedtime.
- Invite others from the same class and their families to join you for a time of caring conversations and sharing mountain highs and valley lows they are feeling because of the changes in the school year.
- Encourage ongoing contact with classmates and parents/guardians through phone calls, social media and by going on hikes or bike rides to enjoy nature and to maintain a community of support.





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Back to School During a Pandemic Online Discussion Guide



Begin by sharing a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your lives and then use the outline below to talk about faith and God’s presence in this moment.



Caring Conversations

Discuss these thoughts and questions:

- What are the joys and challenges of this coming school year?
- How do you hope school will be different for you this year than it was at the end of the last school year?
- How will you connect with friends socially apart from school?
- What are your favorite and least favorite things about a new and different way to be in class and learn?
- What activities do you miss and what ones do you hope to do this year?



Devotions

Read the following:

Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10 (NRSV)

- What word or phrase stands out to you from this reading? Explain.
- How can God strengthen and help you during this school year?



Service

God’s love is shown through acts of kindness towards others. Make a list of things you can do during the school year to show God’s love to classmates, school staff, friends, and family. How will your actions help others while people continue to observe restrictions and social distancing during the pandemic?



Rituals and Traditions

With those online and those in the home, begin with any prayers you wish to offer, and then conclude with this prayer: Dear God, may this school year be filled with learning, excitement, and new opportunities. Give [name student(s) and parent(s)/guardian(s)] joy in your presence and good courage to take on the challenges of each day through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close with this blessing for the student by extending hands towards the person or if online, towards the screen:
May the power and love of God comfort and guide you each and every day.