
UCF Forum

2-10-2021

Learning to Parent in the Pandemic

Bree Watson

University of Central Florida, Bree@ucf.edu

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating.

STARS Citation

Watson, Bree, "Learning to Parent in the Pandemic" (2021). *UCF Forum*. 444.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum/444>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



Learning to Parent in the Pandemic

By Bree Watson

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

We've put a lot of things on hold during the pandemic, but I didn't think parenting skills would be one of them.



(Photo by Standart at iStock)

“I don't know how to be a parent in the real world!” I exclaimed to my husband. I was exasperated, but finally realized the root of recent frustration. The pandemic wasn't letting me be a parent in public.

At the start of shutdowns and social distancing last spring, my son was 19 months old and I was 34 weeks pregnant. I had already wondered how I would balance two kids

under age 2 while doing everyday things, like running errands and going grocery shopping. Do you wear the baby in a carrier and put the toddler in the shopping cart? What about places that don't have shopping carts? How do you keep your curious kiddo from ducking under bathroom stalls while you change the baby's diaper? And most importantly, how on earth do I use the restroom with two kids in tow? The toddler leashes I once mocked were starting to look pretty good.

Of course, I'm not the first parent to encounter these situations. But because of the pandemic, I haven't had to. I have two happy, healthy boys who have pretty much never been in a public, indoor setting together in their lives.

We are not hermits, by any means. The boys go to daycare each weekday, so we try to minimize the risk of exposure the rest of the time. They're just too young to safely and effectively wear a face mask, so we keep them away from situations where face coverings are important and essential.

To be clear, this pandemic has stolen something from everyone. The tragic loss of lives and livelihoods is heartbreakingly measurable, whereas the loss of opportunities and experiences can't be quickly tallied. Some of these invisible losses pile up slowly, and it's only when we look back at how things were that we begin to see the full impact of how things were supposed to be.

Now 2½ years old, my toddler hasn't been inside a store or restaurant in almost a year.

Now 2½ years old, my toddler hasn't been inside a store or restaurant in almost a year. No Target toy aisle. No cookie from the Publix bakery. And no going out to eat as a family. In his world, it's like these places don't even exist.

This thought reminded me of a speaker I saw at a conference a couple years ago. The presenter, a master of misdirection, told the crowd that his home contained a secret room — but it was only a secret to his young daughter. He planned to reveal the existence of this room in the future in order to elicit a sense of magic and wonder, much like when Dorothy opens the drab door of her tornado-tossed home to the vibrant and colorful Land of Oz.

Is this what it will feel like to go back to normal? Will my kids be awed by aisles of items? Amused by elevators and escalators? Or will they be oblivious to the newly expanded outings? Only time will tell.

And while I am more than happy to say that I haven't had to use the fireman's carry to remove a tantrum-entranced toddler from a store — yet! — I also haven't been able to put lessons in pediatric patience to the test outside of our home. These are the types of parent experiences I'm missing — for better or worse. And I know I'm not alone. So, to all the other parents of youngsters who are waiting a bit longer to venture into the great indoors with your tiny humans, I feel your frustration.

My youngest son will be walking soon, and we will celebrate his first birthday much like we celebrated his other firsts — as a family of four eager to return to normal, yet respectful of the risks involved with rushing that return.

And so, I wait. Sometimes angrily, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes in tears. Much like a toddler learning to be patient.

Bree Watson '04 is senior copywriter with UCF's Communications and Marketing team. She can be reached at bree@ucf.edu.