# **How to Help Children with Post-Pandemic Anxiety**

**Source: Sonya Philip, Founder, Learning Matters & Content Developer, TOI LIFESTYLE**

**With the pandemic and its aftermath, the roles of parents in a child’s growth and development have drastically transformed. Families have been spending more time with each other, often turning the dining table into activity zones, using the front lawn for gym classes, and hosting playdates on laptop screens. With these changes though and now, as normalcy begins to set in, children’s routines have also taken a toss, causing them to feel anxious, when in fact, predictability is something children immensely value.We must ensure that the changes aren’t once again too sudden and instead, look for ways to help children cope with post-pandemic stress.**

**Here are four such ways:**

**1. Boost your child’s self-esteem**

Acknowledging and appreciating your child’s efforts can help boost their morale and encourage them to experiment beyond their comfort zone.Let your child know that making mistakes is normal, and an essential part of learning.Switch from using loaded statements like, “It’s okay if you lose. I don’t expectyou to win” to “Knowing how scared you were of trying this, I’m so proud you finally did and that’s what matters the most.”Give them a safe space to define achievements and failures for themselves by encouraging independent, un-moderated play.For instance, instead of giving them a colouring book and defining what shape they should colour, give them a sheet of paper and colours and let them decide what/how they want to draw.

**2. Dedicate a separate space for learning**

“Not every learning environment works for every child and now is a good time to evaluate what works for your child,” says Peter Robertson, president of Laurel Springs School.Identify your child’s learning style, and dedicate a space in the home that provides the child with a nurturing environment to learn.A separate space for parents and children to work encourages healthy boundaries and allows them more autonomy and independence in their learning journey.While setting up the space, do not cast your adult thinking on them. Instead, invite the child to lead the setup while you can play a supportive role.This will not only help them personally connect with the space but also develop ownership for it.

**3. Schedule family time with your child**

Often, our interactions with our children are accompanied with a task like having dinner, check-ins about homework, however, it’s crucial to hold family spaces with the child that lets them interact with you.Organize mini “movie nights” or “dinner dates” with them and let them support you in planning.Encourage them to take responsibilities like, “Would you like to help me with dressing the salad?” while also appreciating their efforts in the process like, “I’m so proud of you for helping me with this task.”Develop a secure attachment with the child and let them know that you are there for them, even if you aren’t physically around.For instance, leaving a small post-it note on their lunchbox or sharing a memento with them will help the child feel your presence despite the physical distance.

**4. Have open and honest communication**

Create a safe space for your child to have an honest and open conversation with you. Encourage them to talk about their feelings, and hold a safe listening space for them.Avoid passing remarks like, “It happens. You’ll feel fine” or “It’s momentary. You’ll get over it.” Also, avoid judging them.Instead, comfort them by acknowledging their emotions, and creating spaces for them to share what would help them like, “I understand this has been bothering you for long and I want to know if talking about it would help?”Offer suggestions to the child but don’t impose your experience on them. Replace phrases like, “You should do this” with “I believe doing this would help.”The past one and a half-year have been a tricky transition for you and the child where they have been distanced from classrooms to spend a majority of their time interacting with their family members only.To make thriving easier for your child, model the behaviour you want them to exhibit.Establish that your love for them is unconditional, and encourage them to develop a secure attachment with you.Create and hold a safe space for them where they can trust you as a peer and not as a disciplinarian.