



### **What Is “Normal” Now?**

By Melodee Simmons, Preschool and Early Learning Center Representative

Everyone is talking about "The New Normal." What is that? What does it mean?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "normal" as “the usual condition, level, or quantity; regular, standard, or natural.”<sup>1</sup>

We can agree that normalcy ended in 2020. All the routines and regular patterns were gone. Most businesses and schools were shut down, grocery stores had empty shelves, and people were told to stay away from friends who normally would be their support system during times of trouble.

Preschools that attempted to stay open suddenly lost a major portion of their enrollment due to parents losing their jobs or fear of the virus. Staff was let go and only a few were retained to keep the preschool open. The normal was no more.

At my school, we celebrated a special event for every month: holiday parties, parent breakfasts, Dr. Seuss’ birthday celebrations, and photo shoots. The best photo shoot was always rodeo pictures. What would you expect, since we are in Houston, with the biggest rodeo every year? “Go Texan Day” starts the celebration as everyone, students as well as teachers, wears western clothes for the day. This was the one thing both parents and staff said they missed and wished we could do.

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<sup>1</sup> The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Copyright © 2016, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts.

## **A New Normal**

Here we are, a year later, trying to make a new normal.

We found ourselves looking at the negatives. "We can't do this; we can't do that." However, we still had to think about the children. We were still responsible for giving them all the experiences they needed to learn as much possible.

One day, I decided we needed to change our thinking. I looked at our past calendar of events. Instead of thinking "We can't do that," we had to ask, "How CAN we do that"?

First, in the current situation, parents or grandparents cannot join us or help in the classroom. How can we still have the parents involved and enjoy the events? We have always sent out notices of coming events, and we continue to make sure everyone knows what is going to happen. Colorful notices are posted in the foyer, which is as far as the parents can enter our building. The office sends out messages on our internet messaging system, and teachers send out their messages. Pictures and videos are taken during the activity and sent to parents immediately, so they can see the fun. The parents love being connected for the events they would have attended in the past. For Dr. Seuss' birthday, parents could not come in to read with the children, but each teacher selected his or her favorite Dr. Seuss book and planned a craft with it. Pictures of the story time and the creative time were shared with parents. The classes displayed their projects with the book in the foyer. Parents enjoyed looking at all the crafts.

Instead of having classes together for some events, each class did it individually. I think having fewer children made events more fun. We have started picture days. Our photographer (of course he is masked) sets up, but he does not position the children. He tells the teacher how to position them. We are about to do our Pre-K graduate pictures and class pictures.

## **Let Go of Some of the Past**

To find that "new normal," I think we need to let go of the past. It might have been great the way we did it, but it is not the only way. Yes, some things will be eliminated; however, if you think about it, there might be a better replacement. Look at each event, talk to your staff, and brainstorm ideas. You will find new ways to do events and different activities you would never have thought of without this necessity to change.

Consider what will benefit and be fun for the children. They are the reason we are doing this. We do not want them to grow up without wonderful memories of their first years in school.

**Melodee Simmons** has worked in early childhood education for more than 30 years. She has worked in private and corporate-owned centers in Christian and secular preschools. Currently, she is the preschool director of Giraffe Kids Learning Center and Development Academy in Houston, Texas. She has received her national director credential. She attends Living Word Church of the Nazarene. You may contact Melodee at [melodee.simmons@yahoo.com](mailto:melodee.simmons@yahoo.com).