

Parenting during a Pandemic:
How Cal Poly Pomona Students and Staff Survived During this Unprecedented Time in History

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Lead: How Cal Poly Pomona students and staff handled the new founded struggles of maintaining their educational and mental health in the wake of a pandemic, while simultaneously being parents and caring for children.

With the Coronavirus pandemic hitting the United States in early 2020, death tolls began to rise, the country went into a state of panic, resulting in many if not all schools across the country closing to cease further infection. The new normal of virtual learning began for those in school, with the majority effected being children and young adults from elementary school age to college students. Namely, Cal Poly Pomona students and staff and furthermore those who are parents, began to face the new struggles of parenting during a pandemic.

With many children across the United States falling behind in school, not being able to keep up with the new world of virtual learning became a much more prevalent challenge as time went by. The reality set in that parents were not doing enough. One student at Cal Poly Pomona offered her perspective and personal experience on how she is surviving COVID-19 and keeping up with her studies as well as her children's education.

“Being on Zoom is the most challenging, I dread it, I can’t focus,” says Pricilla Iglesias, a senior Communications major at Cal Poly Pomona. “I can see a difference in myself and my studies, being home and having to deal with my kids and their studies while simultaneously having to study myself is different than being able to go to the library on campus like I used to.” Iglesias, who is a campus tutor, student and mother of two says that balancing quality time with her children and her studies is challenging in a whole new way. She expresses that before, her mental state was clearer when she could separate and focus on her studies on campus and then come home and focus on her children, whereas now she fears it is all meshed and uncertainty fills her with daily anxiety.

The enmeshment is all too real when it comes to the situation for Cal Poly Pomona students and their families and having to somehow balance time with their kids and remain focused on their education. CPP students are essentially now their children's teachers, tutors and therapists more

than ever, where before they could turn to programs such as childcare on campus, those outlets of hope were impacted and unavailable to those in need.

Marissa Engel, Interim Youth Programs Coordinator at Cal Poly Pomona, explains that her initial response to the pandemic was like everyone else's, she had no idea what to do. Engel states that she was essentially alone at the beginning of the pandemic, after they closed her program for children of CPP Students at the B.R.I.C, she went into crisis mode trying to navigate and figure out all the new challenges of caring for children over Zoom so that parents could get their homework done and study. She reached out to individuals from different programs around campus such as ASI, so that they could help in keeping children engaged virtually and got her team back on track having no choice but to become well versed in the new normal. "You cannot apply natural teaching virtually," Engel says.

"The children over time became well versed in the intricacies of Zoom meetings, so learning the safeguards of virtual learning and managing the chaos of trying to keep twenty or so kids engaged was a challenge." Engel developed the program to be engaging to children, but it wasn't easy, she had to make sure each activity made sense for each child at home and incorporated supplies and items each kid would have in their household so that they could participate and remain engaged to get the help they needed. She also states that she must remain positive, and that the pandemic has brought a new light as to how we view college students who are parents, with a whole new level of respect. "I have to maintain the narrative that so much has changed for the positive, with one of those things being how we view accommodating to parents and staff on campus that have children."

According to IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, "Students with children are especially unlikely to complete a certificate or degree within six years of enrollment, with only 33 percent attaining a degree or certificate in that time. They face significant time demands, with 56 percent of single parents devoting more than 30 hours per week to dependent care, and often have significant financial challenges."

With statistics being what they are for student parents before the pandemic even hit, who's to say if CPP students and staff will ever come back from this. With that notion being a realistic fear amongst many alumni, maintaining positivity and mental health can be seen as key for students on campus and could make the difference between becoming or overcoming a statistic.

When speaking to Leticia Flores a Program Manager at Hathaway Sycamores, a child and family social services agency, she had much to say as to mental health and the wellbeing of parents who are students and their children. "Bottom line, the majority of us are on survival mode", Flores

says. “Checking in on your mental health and the mental health of your children on a constant basis during this pandemic is key.” Flores, who works with troubled youth explains that depression is at an all-time high with the children who live at their facility since the pandemic began. “The isolation and way that they have been thrown into this whole new world of learning virtually has thrown a hard hit at the children of America and their parents.” fears Flores.

She recommends that conducting family meetings to see where everyone is at emotionally, are vital in getting through this pandemic for all families. As well as upkeeping mental health exercises such as going outside for physical activity, journaling and walking to bring release. Lastly, she advises monitoring children and parents to make sure they are dealing with everything in a healthy matter and if further therapy is needed, to seek it out in a nonjudgmental space.

Regardless of where this pandemic has taken us, the positive is on the horizon. With in-person classes resuming in Fall 2021 at Cal Poly Pomona as well as schools across the country already resuming slowly and phasing off virtual learning, there is definite hope of parents at CPP going back to some normalcy. If we as students and staff can take anything from this crippling event in history it could be a new appreciation for one’s own individual struggles as parents, students and staff. It was a challenge but a challenge we will continue to face together, as we pick up the pieces to rebuilding ourselves as well as the community of Cal Poly Pomona better than before.

References

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Sources Contact Information

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