

# The Person I Can No Longer Be | Musings Out Loud

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**Written By: Anna Burgess Yang**

We are now 11 months into this pandemic's direct impact on our daily life. I told my 11-year-old the other day that we are "living history" right now. Some day, entire textbooks and documentaries will be produced about the year 2020 and beyond. I compared it to how World Wars I and II stretched on for years, with no particular end in sight at the time.

As if "living history" is supposed to be some sort of consolation for the havoc this pandemic has wreaked on our lives.

I used to be such a confident parent. I instinctively knew what was right for my children and made decisions easily. Now, I [rarely know what to do](#). It doesn't make me feel better to know that other parents are in the same storm because we are so isolated. Even though it is a shared experience, we are going through this alone.

I have cried on the phone to teachers and the school principal, in front of my kids, while reading text messages from friends, to my therapist, to my husband, and alone. Every time I get an email from one of the teachers, my

heart sinks because I know that it means there is some sort of problem with the work of my 5th grader or 3rd grader.

I have been transformed from this parent who was overwhelmingly proud of my kids and their school performance into one that has to nag them, bribe them, scold them, and impose consequences. I feel like it has wrecked my relationship with my children – and I don't know how to repair it.

When those teachers' emails come in, I feel like a complete failure. That I haven't done enough to support my kids at home. I know the teachers are doing the best that they can and that there are limits when learning is remote: they have to rely on parents to intervene.

I spent several weeks [embarking on a career change](#), and didn't check-in with my kids as often. The result? They both fell desperately behind. I blamed myself. They're *kids*. They are being asked to self-manage in a way that is difficult for adults to handle. Usually the school provides a lot of support for writing things down in an assignment notebook and learning how to keep track of tasks, but that is hard to do in the virtual environment. So they don't have those skills, they get distracted during the day, and I don't know how to help them.

Not only do I not know how to help them, but I can't get them to care. I've come to the conclusion that both of my school-aged children are "social learners." They were motivated by the classroom, praise from their teachers, and their peers. On their own? They find other things around the house that are far more interesting than learning math by repetition in an app or practicing spelling words.

One of my sons told me the other day that I "expect too much" from him, and it broke my heart. He had tears running down his cheeks as I had to follow-up with him – yet again – on missing work. I told him that I *know* this is hard, and this isn't the way that he is supposed to be learning: but it is what we have to do right now, and we just need to survive this school year.

I hate all of this. Experts are talking about the [mental health impacts](#) on kids. And while I am incredibly concerned about that, I also am worried about the long-term impacts of my relationships with my children. Will they look back someday and recognize that I was doing the best that I could? Or will they be permanently altered by this strained time in our lives?

*"No, no, there is no going back.  
Less and less you are  
that possibility you were."*

Wendell Berry