

## 5 Tips for Young Adults Making Your Way Into the Post-Pandemic World

1. Take stock of what you learned during the pandemic.
  - a. About yourself: The pandemic told us what we COULDN'T do, but within that constraint there was plenty you DID do. Think about the things you're proud you DID do, whether it was with or for your family, or regarding school or work, or just for yourself. Maybe you're proud that you helped with your younger siblings or stepped up to make some meals. Maybe you're proud that you passed that a class given how hard everything has been. Maybe you're just proud that you're HERE, ALIVE, because things have been rough. Take stock. Pat yourself on the back. Noticing what you were capable of during this difficult time will strengthen your skills and resilience when the inevitable next challenge comes.
  - b. About what matters: There's nothing like a pandemic to sharpen your focus. We've learned that life is more fragile than we realized. When we get back out there, we all want to be doing things that matter to us, and we all want to be connected with humans who love us as we are. So, what will you lean into? What will you let go of?
  
2. Discard useless childhood norms.
  - a. "Just do your best": This advice comes from a good place but boy does it make you feel like you have to be perfect. You're NOT perfect. No one is. Instead of trying to do your best all the time, focus on trying hard. Some of life's greatest teachers are failure, falling, flailing, floundering, fumbling, and feedback. These things make us wince, but when we acknowledge the pain we can lean into the gain. Make your mistakes and learn from them. Try to move from a 'fixed mindest' to a 'growth mindset.' (This is the work of Professor Carol Dweck at Stanford.) She says that a fixed mindset is the sense that "I'm smart" or "I'm perfect" and that limits us, because we want to stay in our comfort zone and only do things we're already good at because we fear getting evidence that we're not smart or not perfect. A growth mindset, in contrast, is the idea that we can improve through effort. Some helpful reframes are change "This is hard" to "I do hard things" and change "I am smart" to "When I work hard at things, it pays off."
  - b. "Don't talk to strangers": This is perhaps the most inane thing we tell children because it's not a life skill. (The life skill is "learn to discern the one creepy stranger from the vast majority of humans who are perfectly fine.") You have to talk to strangers. Why? Because everyone outside of your family starts as a stranger and you need to interact with them, respectfully, in order to get your own needs met and to be of help to them. You can practice with the clerk at the grocery store or the barista at your favorite coffee shop!

3. Learn to think and do for yourself: You go from being a spoon-fed infant to being a freestanding adult and it doesn't happen by magic. As you accelerate out into adulthood you want to level up your skills and increasingly make your own decisions.
  - a. Chores: If you're not doing chores, start doing them. When you do your part, it benefits the whole family. It also helps you develop responsibility and accountability, as well as a work ethic. And finally, contributing to the running of the household gives you a sense of belonging and a deep satisfaction which will be good for your mental health. If you're doing chores already, start doing more things around the house without being asked.
  - b. Skills: [There is a four-step method for teaching any kid any skill](#) (first a parent does it for the child; then the parent does it with the child; then the parent watches the child do it; then the child can do it completely on their own). It's time for you to take stock of what you CAN do and to ask your parents to teach you to do more things. Some things you might need to learn: how to fill out your own forms/registrations for camp, school, work; how to buy things online or on the phone; how to make travel arrangements; how to cook a decent meal; how to renew prescriptions and make appointments with therapists, doctors, and dentists.
  - c. The workplace: The five stages of employee development are: 1) sit and wait to be told what to do; 2) proactively seek out assignments; 3) recognize that something needs to be done, think through the solution or task, and propose it; 4) just do it and promptly update your boss or team; 5) just do it and only mention it sometime later like at a formal review.
  
4. Stop Pleasing Others: Yes, they love you. But it's your life. They may say they know best, but they don't. (And if they somehow really do know more about you than you do, you need to fix that.) Often our minds are filled with the expectations and judgments of family and friends. But your own voice is in there too, telling you what you would do with your life and with whom you'd be in relationship if it was just up to you. It IS just up to you. The older you get, the more you'll have the financial independence and freedom to make the choices that are right for you. When you're ready to have a tough conversation with your family about where you want to go to school, what you want to study, what you want to do for work, or with whom you are in love, here are the six steps for doing so:
  - a. STEP ONE: Ask to have the conversation. Don't just throw it into the mix at dinner one night or as you are doing the dishes. Say "Folks, could we set aside time to have a conversation about something that's on my mind?" This will concern them, and that's okay. What's on your mind matters and you are signaling this by opening the dialogue in a very mature way.

- b. STEP TWO: Now you're starting the conversation. Open by offering whatever words of respect or love are shared in your family. Some folks use the term "love" others don't. You're trying to honor and thank your parents here. You might say "I know you love me and I love you too," or "I know you've always wanted the best for me," or "You've raised me with really strong values and I'm grateful." This is a further signaling of seriousness and maturity.
  - c. STEP THREE: Frame the topic. You want to discuss your college plans, or what you want to major in, or what you want to do for work or grad school, or a person you've been seeing. Tell them the topic. Tell them you'd like them to share their thoughts about what is right for you. Tell them that after they do that, you'll share what's on your mind.
  - d. STEP FOUR: They talk. Listen deeply and respectfully.
  - e. STEP FIVE: Demonstrate through active listening that you heard them. That is, repeat back the key things that they said, in their words. Do not judge, do not get defensive, do not critique. Say it lovingly. Ask if you've gotten it right. You are preparing them to do the same back to you.
  - f. STEP SIX: It's finally your turn to say what's on your mind about this issue. Thank them for sharing their thoughts and now share your own. When you're done they will have any number of reactions. Hopefully they are struck by how thoughtful and mature you've been. That even if they don't get it or like it, they can see that it matters to you. If they try to tell you you're wrong, or it's not practical, or you shouldn't, see if you can summon their empathy for you by asking them about a time when *their* parents didn't agree with something they wanted to do either in their personal life or work/school. Ask them how that felt to them at the time. Adulthood is doing what is calling you even if those who love you the most laugh, scoff, or threaten you. It's YOUR life.
5. Unleash Your Superpower: Believe it or not, being kind to others is a magical thing that makes everyone's life better (the person you helped; you; and anyone who watched it happen)! When you're down, frustrated, or anxious, try to take a deep breath and do a small act of kindness for someone else. A handy trick is the "+1" game which I learned from Jane McGonigal in her book *SuperBetter*. You ask someone "On a scale of 1 to 10 how's your day going?" Turns out just being *asked* this question makes a person's day better because they feel seen and cared about. But make sure they give you a numeric answer. And no matter what number they give you, then you say, "Is there anything I can do to move it from an X to an X+1?" Hopefully the answer isn't too unreasonable! Hopefully they will turn around and ask the same of you one day! But it will indeed make not just their day better but your day too. Kindness is like a totally free magical elixir that you always have access to.