

TOP TIP #4

Post-pandemic children and youth are different.

The post-pandemic children and youth are psychologically, socially, and culturally different than those who navigated middle and high school BEFORE the pandemic. Most notably the pandemic has increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation; decreased quality of life; and caused disruptions in sleep quality and quantity.

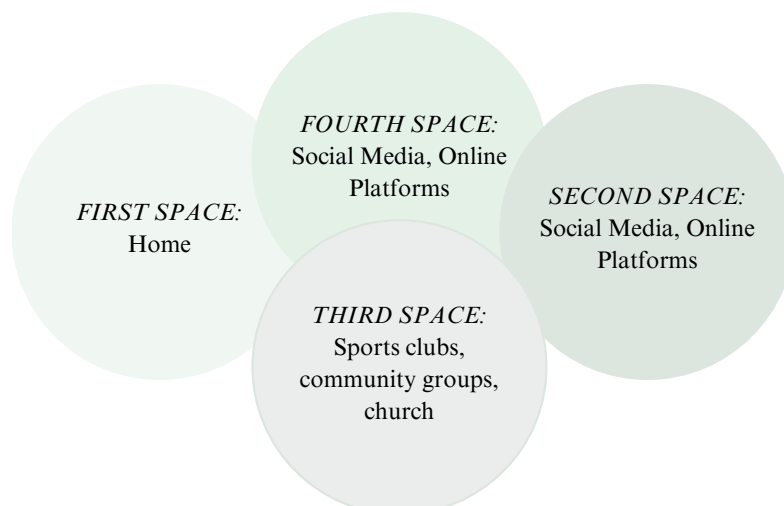
While there are several reasons for the above, much of it can be linked to significant changes that have occurred in the “spaces” the children and youth occupy. Typically, humans occupy three main spaces that are meaningful for socialization: home (first space), school and/or work (second space), and other spaces of frequent attendance (third space), like a swim club. COVID-19 impacted all these spaces – for many, home served multiple purposes (school and work), and sporting spaces became restricted (e.g., no locker room use, social distancing while swimming).

These changes in spaces we occupy had – and continue to have – a direct influence on children, youth (and adult) personality, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and how we socialize and navigate social spaces.

While social media and other online communication methods have rapidly grown over the past decade or so, COVID-19 has both emerged and amplified as an alternative space for socialization. In some ways, it also replaced – at least temporarily – parts of the first, second, and third space, thus influencing children and youth in distinctly different ways than prior generations.

While much of the spaces have now returned to normal, the impact continues to linger, both temporarily and permanently. And despite some outcomes may have been positive (e.g., youth tobacco use has dropped), much can be synthesized as having negative impact on children and youth mental health, decreased social awareness, lack of social and relationship skills, and decreases in perceived sense of control over one’s life.

A visual illustration of how different spaces overlap in children and youth athlete’s lives.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

“Research has confirmed that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was not homogeneous among youth, and some impacts were positive. For the most part, however, COVID-19’s impact on many athlete’s lives was akin to an injury, or illness, loss, or a trauma.”

Critical Questions:

When considering the impact of COVID-19 on your working environment, ask yourself:

1. How did my working environment (third space, swim club) change during COVID-19?
2. What changes have remained post-COVID?
3. What changes have returned to normal?
4. What are the biggest barriers to success within my current working environment?

When considering the impact of COVID-19 on athletes you coach and their parents, reflect on the following:

1. What are notable post-pandemic behaviors of post-pandemic athletes?
2. What are notable post-pandemic behaviors of post-pandemic parents of the athletes?
3. How do these behaviors differ from pre-pandemic athletes and parents?

