

Part 2: Supporting Children’s Social and Emotional Wellbeing During Distance Learning

Osprey Wilds Charter School Division

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INTRODUCTION:

Objectives this webinar will cover:

- Warning signs that kids may be struggling with mental health
- Strategies to help kids maintain a sense of normalcy during distance
- Mindfulness and coping mechanisms to support social and emotional health
- Resources or families who are in need of additional mental health support

A special thanks to teachers, educational assistance, school staff and administration for an amazing transition during unprecedented times!

Remember:

We are all getting used to a new normal and learning together every day

We assume everyone is doing the best they can

Be gentle with yourself and others

“Been homeschooling a 6-year-old and 8 year old for one hour and 11 minutes. Teachers deserve to make a billion dollars a year. Or a week.”

--Shonda Rimes on Twitter 3/16/2020

WARNING SIGNS AND HOW TO HELP:

Pay Particular Attention to:

- Students who have had anxiety
- Students who have had depression or suicidal ideation
- Students who have learning and attention disorders
- Students whose family have lost jobs or income
- Students with family who are vulnerable to COVID-19
- Student with a parent who is a first responder or in another profession where they are exposed to the virus or are being asked to respond in an intense way

Consider Trauma History

- Kids who are living in a chaotic home environment will likely be receiving much less structure and guidance from the adults in their lives
- Kids with trauma history
- May see increase in symptoms or warning signs

Warning Signs By Age Group

Preschool Age

Warning Signs: -Fear of being alone -Bad dreams -Speech difficulties -Loss of bladder/bowel control -Change in appetite -Increased temper tantrums, whining -Clinging behaviors	Ways to Help: -Patience and tolerance -Provide reassurance verbal and physical -Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling -Encourage parents to maintain regular family routines -Avoid media exposure
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School Age Children, 6-12

Warning Signs: -Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior -Clinging, nightmares -Sleep/appetite disturbance -Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) -Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest -Competition for parents' attention -Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school	Ways to Help: -Patience, tolerance and reassurance -Encourage students to stay in touch with friends through telephone and internet -Encourage regular exercise and stretching -Engage in educational activities that would be done in class -Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done within your community
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourage expression through play and conversation -Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines -Encourage family to limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen -Clarify misinformation
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Middle School

<p>Warning Signs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches, rashes) -Sleep/appetite disturbance -Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy -Ignoring health promotion behaviors -Isolating from peers and loved ones -Concerns about stigma and injustices -Avoiding/cutting school 	<p>Ways to Help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Patience, tolerance, reassurance -Encourage continuation of routines -Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force) -Stay in touch with friends through telephone, internet, video games -Encourage family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings to enhance health promotion behaviors -Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen -Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during pandemic -Focus on what children can do--giving them a sense of choice or control
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Distance Learning Stressors:

- Being asked to “go” to school in their own homes, bedrooms, play rooms--it’s hard being told what to do in your home by someone else
- Lack of structure--workload feels overwhelming
- Isolation from peers
- Learning new technology platforms
- Increased screen time

Strategies to support students:

- Encourage a consistent schedule
- Follow set plans as schedules
- Encourage students to do ‘classes’ in similar order to school day (older students)

- Take short breaks--encourage MOVEMENT
- Normalize feelings for stress, being overwhelmed, anxiety and fear
- Provide praise and encouragement

If you have individual meetings with kids, ask questions about their lives:

- “What do you think about being home?”
- “How are you spending your time?”
- “How is your workload? Too much, too little?”
- “What are your family members doing while home?”

Opportunities to Improve Resiliency:

- Remind students of their unique strengths, qualities, and character traits
- Model problem solving skills
- Maintain your connection with students, provide support and reassurance
- Remind students, how difficult situations can help us grow--talk about the lesson, the growth because of difficulties
- Talk about the possibility of going back to school

MINDFULNESS AND GROUNDING:

Mindfulness helps us stay in the present, which helps us to calm our bodies and minds, think better, learn better. Bringing attention to the body is a way to ground oneself, and it can invite students to share what is present in their world.

- An example of a simple mindfulness activity asks students to utilize all 5 senses--to look around the room and identify one thing “I see...hear... feel...touch...smell...and taste”.
- Follow along in the webinar for a simple mindfulness exercise, or see the additional resources for other ways to practice mindfulness.

If you are calm as the educator and adult, you can better model coping mechanisms to your students.

Mindfulness and Grounding Skills

These tools can be used in person, in the classroom, over zoom meetings. There are all kinds of exercises you can use for students of different ages and abilities.

- Model being calm during class meetings--calm voice and body as an anchor
- 4 Corner Breathing (Picture a square: inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, inhale for 4...)
- Mindfulness videos (gonoodle.com), stopbreathethink.com, calm.com, worrywisekids.com
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Grounding exercises for people experiencing panic (find 5 green things in the room)
- [How Mindfulness Can Help During Covid-19 article](#) -- Lots of great ideas: mindful meal, blowing bubbles, coloring, listening to music, belly breathing
- Breathing app on the apple watch

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES AND STUDENTS:

- Continue to utilize your school social workers
- Utilize local mental health agencies
- Crisis lines and crisis texting options:
 - National suicide prevention hotline (800) 273-8255
 - MN Text Crisis Line- text HOME or MN to 741741
- Local crisis lines (look up your area)
- Check county websites for area specific food and shelter resources
 - Free Meals for Kids application

Parents or adults may be struggling

- County websites may provide other resources, like Domestic Violence call or text crisis hotlines

ChangetoChill.org

- Activities, videos, diy projects

[Very well family](#) -- coping skills for kids offered by type

- Emotion focused, problem focused

[Mental Health Delta Division](#)

- Interactive games

FAQs:

Q: My 17 yo was working and we had him stop. How do we balance the need for safety with the needs for structure, interaction, and motivation that come from working?

A: It will be important to weigh the physical safety of your child in the work environment. If you determine your child can be safe at work and your child is suffering from not working, then that might be a choice that will be important for your family.

Q: How do you differentiate between signs of abuse and neglect versus Covid-19 induced depression, anxiety, withdrawal etc.?

A: This is something that is really difficult. If you're only seeing kids on zoom, it can be hard to see signs or symptoms that might give you a clearer picture of what the student is struggling with. Asking questions will be important to help identify concerns. There are appropriate ways to ask direct questions, and that can be necessary if you are seeing signs or have concerns. Pay extra attention to students who have a history of any kinds of abuse or being placed in foster care. If there is a noticeable change in a student's typical behavior, that can be a signal of an adjustment to this transition. Child Protection Services will have guidance and wisdom should you take a concern to them, and they can help determine what next steps might be--whether it involves them or not.

Q: This is a high stress time for adults. For some families, child mental health and emotional care might not be a top priority--or something they are even aware of. Can you provide some language that educators could use to encourage families to monitor and pay attention to their child's mental and emotional wellbeing?

A: This is an ongoing struggle. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that we need shelter and food and physical safety, which then allows us to build in other levels of need. The focus of support should be in securing those basic needs first, and then reminding families that students need support for mental health in order to be able to be successful in learning throughout these transitions. In communicating with parents and building a rapport with families, guide them to local resources for food, shelter, and internet access as necessary. It is important to remember the other support staff at your school--like social workers, counselors, and administrators who may have more skills or availability to support families in securing these basic needs. As those needs are met, you can be an advocate for that student through direct support and practice, and communication with the family.

Mindfulness exercise.

Body Scan Script:

Begin by bringing your attention into your body.

You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.

You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.

Take a few deep breaths.

And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.

You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.

You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.

Notice your back against the chair.

Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.

Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.

Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.

Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.

Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.

Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.

Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.