

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND THE COVID PANDEMIC

What Teachers and Parents Can Do

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Research on Youth Mental Health and the Coronavirus

- **Parent** reports indicate that high percentages of both adults and kids experienced psychological distress early in the pandemic.
- **Educators** reported that their **biggest concerns** about students' adjustment to the new school year were **learning deficits and anxiety** over returning to school in person- expected **economic hardship** to be the highest hurdle for those students who experience it, more significant than either learning deficits or anxiety.
- **Economic instability**, living in an area hit harder by the virus, and preexisting mental health problems are some of the most notable risk factors for adults experiencing mental health challenges during the pandemic.
- The pandemic has had meaningful impacts on **mental health**, but not everyone has been affected to the same degree or in the same way.

• 2021 CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH REPORT- CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

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Some people with disabilities, such as those on the **autism spectrum or with intellectual disability**, find it very difficult to adjust and adapt to changes required by the pandemic.

Many struggle with the need to find new routines in their daily lives.

Some children with disabilities **regressed** in their skills/behavior due to interruptions in programming and services.

A person with intellectual disabilities or autism.... may have more difficulty **understanding or implementing important public health information** that can help them stay safe and healthy.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-pandemic-isnt-over-particularly-for-people-with-disabilities-202105252464>

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- Nonetheless, **teens were optimistic**: 67% agreed with the statement, “I am hopeful that I will adapt and rebound from the challenges of the pandemic”
- Research and historical context also suggest that **young people are resilient** and that many (especially those with fewer risk factors) will likely emerge from the pandemic without significant mental health challenges

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- Social Emotional Learning Supports Around COVID-19
- Reinforcing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ⇒ ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- ⇒ RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- ⇒ SELF-CONFIDENCE
- ⇒ SELF-EFFICACY

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- ⇒ PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- ⇒ EMPATHY
- ⇒ APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- ⇒ RESPECT FOR OTHERS

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- ⇒ IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- ⇒ SOLVING PROBLEMS
- ⇒ EVALUATING
- ⇒ REFLECTING
- ⇒ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- ⇒ IMPULSE CONTROL
- ⇒ STRESS MANAGEMENT
- ⇒ SELF-DISCIPLINE
- ⇒ SELF-MOTIVATION
- ⇒ GOAL SETTING
- ⇒ ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- ⇒ COMMUNICATION
- ⇒ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- ⇒ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- ⇒ TEAMWORK



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- Teach **SELF AWARENESS** by encouraging children to talk about and identify their emotions. Reassure them that fears and worries are **natural responses** in uncertain times and that adults are doing everything they can to help keep them and others safe.
- **Teach self-confidence: Recognize children's strengths** and reinforce the role they play in having responsible behavior.
- **Express confidence in their ability** to seek help or find answers when needed, or to **let adults know when others may need help or assistance.**
- **Praise children frequently for applying these strengths** to help manage their feelings and emotions during the current health crisis.
- **Teach self-efficacy: Help children feel a sense of control** over their circumstances. Explain that, while things may seem frightening, there are things **they** can do to keep themselves and others safe.
- Talk about the importance of washing their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds each time. Discuss the importance of eating healthy and getting plenty of sleep at night.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- Teach **SELF-MANAGEMENT** skills by modeling emotional control and managing daily stresses.
- **Teach impulse control:** Talk about the importance of **“thinking before acting.”** Discuss situations you may have observed in which the health crisis led to feelings of frustration for people.
- Example- explain how the crisis led to **shortages** in some medical and household supplies.
- **Talk about ways in which you observed people managing their impulses to cope with the frustration of not being able to access these supplies.**
- **Teach stress management:** Discuss how the health crisis has led to many changes for people and some of these changes have resulted in stressful situations.
- Example- explain how school closings might lead older children to fear that they may not be able to finish their courses for graduation.
- Identify ways in which children might manage their stresses, such as through mindfulness and relaxation strategies.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- **Teach goal setting: Help children learn to set and achieve goals.** Since many schools will be closing, it is important for parents to set and keep a normal routine at home.
- Goal setting can become a large part of that routine. Help children **identify personal and academic goals for the week**, then set daily goals and break them into several shorter goals that can be easily achieved.
- Will also help keep their minds occupied and off the health crisis.
- **Teach organizational skills:** Since many communities will have reduced access to services and supplies as a result of social distancing efforts, this can be an excellent opportunity to teach preparedness through organizational skills.
- Explain to children that many people will be remaining at home during this time because community activities and events have been cancelled to ensure everyone's safety- families need to plan for food and supplies they might need while staying home.
- Turn it into a fun activity such as an adventure or 'stay'cation. Enlist children's assistance in planning and organizing the activities and supplies needed for an anticipated 14-day stay at home.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

- Teach **SOCIAL AWARENESS** by **modeling empathy and perspective taking**. When opportunities are presented, discuss with your children the importance of practicing this in every day and every way.
- **Teach empathy:** Acknowledge and discuss how others might be impacted by the health crisis, social distancing and economic shifts.
- Talk about how this might feel if it were you or your family.
- Discuss ways in which your family **might help others** in need.
- **Teach perspective-taking, appreciation for diversity and respect for others:** Identify how other children and families might respond differently to this crisis.
- Discuss how some groups and families **have different cultures, customs, or beliefs**, and while these may be unfamiliar to us, this doesn't mean they are wrong.
- **Spend time discussing the fact that we are more alike than we are different.**
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

- Teach **RELATIONSHIP SKILLS** by demonstrating and discussing ways to improve communications and ways to listen and cooperate with one another.
- During this crisis, there is a chance that children will be confined at home for an extended period of time due to school closures.
- Home confinement may result in children having “extra” time on their hands, thus they may become bored or agitated.
- If there are siblings or other children in the home, there’s an added chance there may be disagreements and conflict.
- This is an excellent opportunity for parents to model, teach, and reinforce relationship-building skills.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- **Teach *communication skills*:** Encourage children to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs in a non-emotional manner.
- Teach them to listen to what others say, then if clarification is needed, reflect what they heard using “I heard you say...” statements.
- Point out when body language and non-verbal expressions might be communicating a different message than their words.
- Teach children to use “I” statements instead of “You” statements.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- **Teach *cooperation and negotiation skills***: When conflicts or problems arise, parents should deal with their own emotions first, then listen to their children, rather than jumping in with a solution.
 - Encourage children to use effective communication skills to resolve problems and conflicts.
 - Explain that **negative emotions are a natural experience** when having problems and conflict and it is important to learn how to cope with these emotions, especially since the resolution may not always have the desired outcome.
 - Learning to experience and cope with conflict and failure is an important factor in children's character development.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- Teach **RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING** by teaching children how to make constructive choices, especially during this health crisis.
 - Children's safety is a priority at all times, but the current crisis offers an opportunity to teach them problem-solving strategies, which can reinforce their ability to make appropriate decisions for their own safety.
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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- **Teach children *problem-solving steps*:** Children may not always know what the problem really is- important for parents help them learn how to analyze the situation to resolve the problem responsibly.
- May include looking at social norms and expectations and evaluating consequences of their actions.
- Teenagers, for example, may encounter situations in which they face exposure to the virus as a result of an opportunity to engage in a desired social activity.
- They must be able to use problem-solving skills to be able to weigh the risks and benefits of their decision, including the possibility of exposing, not just themselves, but also others, as a result of their decision.
- Parents can help them navigate this process by teaching them the following strategies.
- Parents may want to employ other examples to help reinforce these problem-solving steps:
 - Identifying the problem
 - Analyzing the situation
 - Identifying a potential solution
 - Determining the potential consequences of the solution
- Donna Black, SEL4TX

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Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting From COVID-19

- Families across the country are adapting to the evolving changes in daily life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Most schools, places of public gathering, and nonessential businesses were closed, and parents and other caregivers were faced with helping their families adjust to the new normal.
- This includes trying to keep children occupied, feeling safe, and attempting to keep up with school work as best as possible.
- None of this is easy- it helps to stay focused on what is possible to reinforce a sense of control and to reassure children that they are okay, and that the situation will get better
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19> Page 5 of 6

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- Important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events.
- Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking the necessary actions that reduce the risk of illness.
- Teaching children **positive preventive measures**, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.
- This is also a opportunity for adults to **model for children** problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion as we all work through adjusting daily schedules, balancing work and other activities, getting creative about how we spend time, processing new information from authorities, and connecting and supporting friends and family members in new ways.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>
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STAY CALM, LISTEN, AND OFFER REASSURANCE

- Be a role model. Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.
- Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19.
- Explain social distancing.
- Focus on the positive
- Establish and maintain a daily routine
- Offer lots of love and affection.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>
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MONITOR TELEVISION VIEWING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Parents/guardians should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for themselves and their children.
- Dispel rumors and inaccurate information.
- Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19> Page 5 of 6

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TAKE TIME TO TALK

- Let your children's questions guide you.
- Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts.
- Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your children's well-being.
- Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones.
- Younger children absorb scary information in waves.
- Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life.
- A sense of control reduces fear.
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19> Page 5 of 6

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BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

- Correct misinformation.
- Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears.
- Explain simple safety steps.
- Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19> Page 5 of 6

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KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE-APPROPRIATE

- **Early elementary school children.**
- Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick.
- **Upper elementary and early middle school children**
- They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading.
- **Upper middle and high school students.**
- Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19> Page 5 of 6

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STAY CONNECTED TO SCHOOL

- **Locate learning resources.**
- Take advantage of the companies/online platforms offering free learning opportunities.
- **Stay in touch.**
- Find out how the school is communicating with families and students. Be sure to read any communications you receive.
- **Connect with school staff.** Reach out to your child's teacher and other relevant school staff if you have concerns about their coping and keeping up with assignments or activities.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>
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BE AWARE OF YOUR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

- Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.
- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
- **Elementary school children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

• <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-...resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>
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Supporting Children's Mental Health: Tips for Parents and Educators

- **Create a sense of belonging.** Feeling connected and welcomed is essential to children's positive adjustment, self-identification, and sense of trust in others and themselves. Building strong, positive relationships among students, school staff, and parents is important to promoting mental wellness
- **Promote resilience.** Adversity is a natural part of life and being resilient is important to overcoming challenges and good mental health. Connectedness, competency, helping others, and successfully facing difficult situations can foster resilience.
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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- **Ensure a positive, safe school environment.** Feeling safe is critical to students' learning and mental health. Promote positive behaviors such as respect, responsibility, and kindness. Prevent negative behaviors such as bullying and harassment.
- Provide easily understood rules of conduct and fair discipline practices and ensure an adult presence in common areas, such as hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, and playgrounds. Teach children to work together to stand up to a bully, encourage them to reach out to lonely or excluded peers, celebrate acts of kindness, and reinforce the availability of adult support.
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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- **Teach and reinforce positive behaviors and decision making.** Provide consistent expectations and support. Teaching children social skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution supports good mental health. "Catch" them being successful. Positive feedback validates and reinforces behaviors or accomplishments that are valued by others.
- **Develop competencies.** Children need to know that they can overcome challenges and accomplish goals through their actions. Achieving academic success and developing individual talents and interests helps children feel competent and more able to deal with stress positively. Social competency is also important. Having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones can enhance mental wellness.

• National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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- **Encourage good physical health.** Good physical health supports good mental health. Healthy eating habits, regular exercise and adequate sleep protect kids against the stress of tough situations. Regular exercise also decreases negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and depression.
- **Educate staff, parents and students on symptoms of and help for mental health problems.** Information helps break down the stigma surrounding mental health and enables adults and students recognize when to seek help.
- School mental health professionals can provide useful information on symptoms of problems like depression or suicide risk. These can include a change in habits, withdrawal, decreased social and academic functioning, erratic or changed behavior, and increased physical complaints.

• National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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- **Ensure access to school-based mental health supports.**
- School psychologists, counselors, and social workers can provide a continuum of mental health services for students ranging from universal mental wellness promotion and behavior supports to staff and parent training, identification and assessment, early interventions, individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, and referral for community services.
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- **Encourage helping others.**
- Children need to know that they can make a difference.
- Pro-social behaviors build self-esteem, foster connectedness, reinforce personal responsibility, and present opportunities for positive recognition.
- Helping others and getting involved in reinforces being part of the community.

• National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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- **Provide a continuum of mental health services.**
- School mental health services are part of a continuum of mental health care for children/ youth.
- Build relationships with community mental health resources. Be able to provide names and numbers to parents.
- **Establish a crisis response team.**
- Being prepared to respond to a crisis is important to safeguarding students' physical and mental well-being.
- School crisis teams should include relevant administrators, security personnel and mental health professionals who collaborate with community resources.
- In addition to safety, the team provides mental health prevention, intervention, and postvention services.

• National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Supporting children's mental health: Tips for parents and educators* [Handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

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