Coping with Uncertainty as School Begins: What We Can Do to Help Our Kids and Ourselves

Presented by Dr. Mary Murphy
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Objectives

• What we know from past experiences about how we can cope with school reopening
• How parents can support themselves (mental health & self care)
• How to support our children (focus on what you can control, coping, & flexibility)
• What professionals can do
‘It Was Just Too Much’: How Remote Learning Is Breaking Parents

For the adults in the house, trying to do their own jobs while helping children with class work has become one of the most trying aspects of the pandemic.
A third of Americans now show signs of clinical anxiety or depression, Census Bureau finds amid coronavirus pandemic

By Alyssa Fowers and William Wan  May 26

For every 100 American adults, 34 show symptoms of anxiety, depression, or both

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/26/americans-with-depression-anxiety-pandemic/?arc404=true
This is our season of coaching our children through disappointment
What our kids need to hear right now

“We need to give our kids hope. We need to help them see this as a temporary season, to give them some sense that their world, while being profoundly changed, will not be forever marred.”

“We can give our kids one of two perspectives. That of victimhood: that they've lost things they’re entitled to, that they should remain outraged, and that they will be forever scarred by their current losses. Or that of empowerment: narratives of delayed gratification, of resiliency, of grieving and moving on, and of finding new meaning and new coping skills.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/08/20/this-is-our-season-coaching-our-children-through-disappointment/
What we know from past experience

• Return to school and the reopening of our community comes with anxiety and worries

• Although no roadmap for this what we know about coping comes from research on children’s adjustment after past events such as natural disasters (earthquakes & tornadoes) and school shootings. Events that happen without warning or possibility to prepare

• Kids are more likely to experience anxiety, withdrawal & behavior issues

• The silver lining....the research shows what interventions were done and that kids do get better usually within 6 months and when we focus on their social emotional needs (SEL)
What is social emotional learning?

The adult version of this for us we will do best if we focus on our own mental health and self care.
1. Focus on what you can control
Coping Skills

• SEL curriculum focuses on teaching kids how to calm themselves (self regulation), empathy (connection), problem solving & focusing (self management), relationship / social skills (connection)

• Coping skills are our best self regulation tool and the cornerstone of social emotional learning
  • Breathing (self management)
  • Co-regulation and Self regulation (connection)
  • Reflective listening (connection)
  • Focus on gratitude (mindset)
  • Establishing routines (self management)
breathe.
Teach our kids self regulation through Breathing

• Breathe in through nose for 3 seconds and out from mouth for 5-6 seconds (exhale longer than inhale is key!)
• Slow motion imagery
• Feet and hand position, no crossing body
• Noisy breath
• Closing eyes
• Finding time to integrate into your day
• Use apps like Calm or Stress Guide
Focus on Coregulation-
regulating our emotions so they can share our calm and frontal lobe.
Use Reflective Listening

Basic Reflective Listening Formula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tentative Opening</th>
<th>+ Feeling</th>
<th>+ About/Because/When + Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It sounds like</td>
<td>you feel mad</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hear you saying that</td>
<td>you feel sad</td>
<td>because of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I hear you correctly</td>
<td>you feel glad</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You seem to be saying</td>
<td>you feel afraid</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I hear you saying</td>
<td>you feel confused</td>
<td>because of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm not sure I am follow</td>
<td>you feel ashamed</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I hearing you say</td>
<td>you feel lonely</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Begin each day with gratitude
Routines

• Establishing routines
  • provides predictability and brings about a sense of calm especially in times of stress and anxiety

• Consistent sleep routine

• Exercise, walks together, game nights, predictable opportunities for connection
3. Focus on being flexible

• Know this........
• Things will go wrong
• What can we do to be flexible and revise plans in the face of new information and changing school situations
• Big picture things: Letting go of rigid thinking we had about right and wrong, Revisit our view of what is success for our children, modeling flexibility and assumption of good will, lack of judgment of others/respecting differences- what’s right for some is not right for all, kids noticing other kids not “following the rules” and witnessing our reactions as a guide, reactivity vs acceptance
• Practical things: Have backup plans for childcare, full time remote learning scenario
Let's start practicing this now

IF A FRIEND SAYS...

"I'm sending my kids back to school"
"I'm doing virtual learning"
"I'm homeschooling my kids"

WE SAY...

"I'm so proud of you!
I know it was not an easy decision to make!"
Helpful analogies when describing the flexibility needed to roll with the changes and the uncertainty we're all facing.

“Ride the wave.

Experience your emotion as a wave, coming and going.

Don't try to get rid of emotion.
Don't push it away.
Try not to block emotion.
Try not to suppress emotion.
Don't try to keep emotion around.
Don't hold on to it.
Don't amplify it.”

You can't stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf.

Swami Satchidananda
What can parents do to help?
• Stay vigilant about noticing signs you and or your child are overwhelmed and may need a mental health professional to help
how to be flexible and revise plans in the face of new information and changing school situations; and methods to
What can parents do?

• Focus on your self care- limit alcohol intake and media exposure

• Focus on connection- developing connections w teachers, between teachers & parents and between teachers & kids
  • Especially for kids w special needs (IEPs & 504 plans)
  • Teachers still need to access those plans and address the kids’ needs
Remember outside help is available

• Know when to enlist professionals
• Professionals can help by providing:
  • A comprehensive evaluation with objective data to guide a differential diagnosis and develop a treatment plan
  • Deliver anxiety-specific therapies such as biofeedback, Coping Cat™ CBT, Applied Behavior Analysis (BCBA), and EMDR
  • Provide parent coaching
  • Teach good sleep hygiene
• Teletherapy works, services can and should still be accessed
Remember

• We are in this together kids and parents alike
• We may have never gone through something exactly like this situation but others like it in the past are our guide
• When we focus on SEL needs (our own and our kids) we recover and even thrive building more resiliency and grit than we ever would have otherwise
• Modeling flexibility, importance of staying connected, and staying focused on what we can control we will all do better no matter what changes are ahead of us
Resources

• Wearing masks:
• Books – explaining covid to kids:
  Why Did the Whole World Stop?: Talking With Kids About COVID-19 by Heather Black
  What is Social Distancing?: A Children's Guide & Activity Book by Lindsey Coker Luckey
• Reflective Listening:
• Coregulation:
• Coping Skills:
  https://www.centervention.com/social-skills-resources-for-parents/
Resources

Treatment Resources:

• Child Mind Institute (Telehealth visits available during this time, no ins)
• Hartford anxiety clinic (Telehealth visits available during this time, takes most ins)
• 211 Infoline (mental health resources & mobile crisis)
• Ct Children’s Medical Center, Danbury (Pediatric neurology, takes most ins)
• Associated Neurologists, Danbury (Pediatric neuropsychology, takes most ins)

Websites:

• www.childmind.org www.understood.org
• www.nimh.nih.gov
• www.kidshealth.org
• https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2015/10/28/6-books-about-anxiety-for-families-with-special-needs/
Resources

Physical signs of anxiety
https://tinyurl.com/ycu7u5tf

Tips for talking to children about COVID:
 • https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids
Resources

• Text ACT to 741741 to contact the Crisis Text Line and connect with a trained Crisis Counselor.

• CDC resources for coping with anxiety

• SAMHSA tips for social distancing
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