

St. Matthew School: Counselling Connection:

Navigating Our Way Together: Mental Health Tips

Having unique feelings, thoughts and behaviors in response to the COVID-19 outbreak is completely normal. There are many variables which are affecting families of our St. Matthew's community very differently. For our children, it is *most important* that they feel safe, connected, supported and regulated in this time of uncertainty. Here are some basic suggestions that you might find helpful to support your child's emotional wellbeing:

- Reassure children that it is normal to feel some anxiety. This is how our bodies react to unfamiliar events.
- Remind children that they are not alone in their feelings and that we are all in this together. It is okay for them to hear that you are frustrated too, but the difficult feelings don't last. They will come and go, along with positive feelings
- Encourage children to express their feelings through talk, art, movement, play, poetry, writing, etc.
- Have conversations about "what if" questions and provide answers for them. Anxiety will come from not knowing. For example. "What if we don't go back to school?" "Well, if you don't go back to school, you will still learn, and you will still go into Gr. ___ in the fall. It will be a different year for sure, but we will move through it together."
- Encourage children to practice daily gratitude for what is going well in their lives (maybe a gratitude journal they can keep to remember this unique time).
- Make time for daily meditations that encourage children to access their breath to calm their mind and bodies, and to anchor their minds into the present. Model this and do it with them. I am happy to send you some links.
- Offer perspective on what we can control and what we cannot control. Help children refocus their energy on what they have control over.
- Coach children to reframe consistent negative thinking. Reminder that our thoughts influence feelings and behavior. You can validate feelings and also say, "another way to think about this is...."
- Encourage children to cut down on excessive exposure to media coverage. It can create unnecessary panic and stress.
- Remind children that we need to focus on the big picture. It is *okay* to let some things go. Children will *not* be completing course work in *exactly* the same way as they would be in the class.
- Encourage connections with family members and friends (online or by phone) who make children feel good.
- Advise children to make time in their day for physical stress relief (go for a walk, listen to music, dance, work out, etc).
- Alter your home environment to decrease stress (relaxing music, sunlight, remove clutter, stick to routines, allow for alone time for all, stick to weekday sleep routine, etc).
- Take one day at a time and find things to enjoy in the moment (our mind tends to race to future worry thoughts that are not always based on facts).
- Use metaphors to help children stay hopeful. For example:
 - When you shake a snow globe, the pieces get all shaken up. Eventually they fall back into place. The pieces might not fall exactly where they were, but they will land.
 - It might feel like a boulder has been placed on the road we were travelling on. We need to pause and think about how we can move around the boulder and continue down the road in a different way.
 - We are going through a bit of a storm right now. The sun is still there and will come out as it always does.
 - Growth happens when conditions aren't the best. Roots grow right through cement sometimes.
 - We need to recharge our physical and mental batteries. Sometimes they get drained.
 - Jesus taught us that when we fall and have challenges, we can get up and keep going.
- Children will mirror what they see from us, so our own ability to manage feelings is important! Remember that stress can create reactions that look like behavior issues.
- If you are at home, take this time to build the relationship with your child through engagement in games and activities that you have time for!
- There are various books, websites, apps, etc. posted on my website under Resources:
Anxiety/Resiliency/Emotional Regulation Resources: www.paulaknoxcounsellor.com
- Email myself if you need support or have questions. Students can email me as well: paula.knox@cssd.ab.ca