



present:

Coping with COVID

A Series for the Glenbrook Community

PREPARING FOR SCHOOL LESSONS FROM PART 2

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at a time of challenge and controversy."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Focusing on resilience, providing parental support and guidance, and taking advantage of local resources are key to managing the unique school year ahead, according to mental health experts who spoke during a webinar presented by CATCH and Glenbrook School District 225: Coping with COVID: Preparing for School on August 6, 2020.

"In this time of uncertainty, the one thing we do know is that the school year will look and feel extremely different than anything our kids have experienced. It is more important than ever that we take care of our own well-being as well as the well-being of our friends, our family, and our community," said Lara Cummings, Glenbrook South H.S. Assistant Principal, Student Services, as she introduced the evening program. Presenters then outlined ideas and strategies to help families feel more competent and confident when standing in the challenges and controversies of parenting during a pandemic.

Resilience: What is it? Why is it so important? How do we build it?

"Resilience is a process of learning and growing in response to adversity. Essentially bad stuff happens and you evolve while dealing with that bad stuff," said Cody Schraft, PhD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Family Service Center, before providing a close look at this life skill and ways to build it. She further explained, resilience develops by balancing stability and flexibility, by creating consistency despite change and adapting to meet new and old needs and demands like wearing masks and needing to learn.

Schraft cautioned resilience is not about positive thinking and getting rid of negative feelings. "You actually want to be able to be ok with being angry and upset when you face challenges," she said, adding, "It's really about managing the intensity of those feelings so you are better able to problem solve and communicate." Resilience is clearly more important during COVID-19 as we are together more during times of persistent stress, altered routines, loss, and constant change.

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STRATEGIES TO FOSTER RESILIENCE

Constructive dialogues: The goal of these conversations is clarification and understanding rather than solutions and fixes. Everyone should have the freedom to share thoughts, concerns, and ideas. Each person should feel heard, taken seriously, respected, affirmed, and validated. These experiences lead to feeling loved and cared for, which builds trust and mutual support and ultimately leads to stronger relationships, which reduces tension. Schraft made the point that these conversations may not end with everyone feeling relaxed and happy.

Weekly quality time is a great way to create regular constructive dialogues with family.

- Schedule it ahead of time
- Treat it as important, like a doctor's appointment
- Avoid electronics, which get in the way of conversation
- Make a list of activities that include everyone's preferences and alternate

Collaborative problem solving: The goal here is for family members to address issues together by starting with a brainstorming session where you encourage creativity, recognize that someone else's idea doesn't reflect poorly on another, and accept that it's ok to be wrong. First ideas might not work out. These moments can create silliness and laughter which can break the tension. Then take a science experiment approach: pick an idea that you think is best, try it, evaluate it later, and figure out if it worked. If not, go back to your list from your brainstorming session.

Weekly family meetings can foster collaborative problem solving.

- Schedule them ahead of time
- Review topics from the previous week
- Prioritize topics, create an action plan, and write it down to reduce arguments later

Daily check-ins support both constructive dialogue and collaborative problem solving.

Keep it brief and pair them with a daily activity that feels natural like over a meal or a morning cup of coffee.

Routine & Structure: Consistent certainties help combat the impact of things out of one's control. Caregivers should take the lead with input from kids which will help them buy-in and follow along with the plan. Be sure to coordinate work and fun. It can be easy to lose track of time when you are working from home so be sure to build in breaks. Then respect and support others' routines. They are more likely to do the same for you in return.

House Rules & Expectations

- Frame rules and expectations in a positive way. Focus on what should be done rather than what should be avoided. For example, if you tell your child not to eat a cookie before dinner, they will find the loophole and eat pie. Rather, provide another option like a healthy choice before dinner.
- Incorporate general rules that reflect family values like showing respect and include specific rules like dinner together without media.
- Involve kids as much as possible in identifying rules. It will lead to more cooperation.
- Review and adjust rules during family meetings.

House Rules & Expectations (cont.)

- Promote compliance with positive reinforcement.
 - Offer verbal praise, give it right away, and make it specific.
 - What about rewards? Aren't I just bribing my kid? A reward is positive reinforcement *after* something is done, not *before* which is bribery. Rewards are effective and sometimes necessary. "Reality is there's no one that's 100% intrinsically motivated to do things especially when those things are chores and work, we need those reinforcements, we need those rewards to keep going. Kids need that too," said Schraft.

Self-Care & Self-Compassion

"Care of others starts with care of self, so it's really important to take time for yourself to recharge yourself," said Schraft. Start with the basics like nutrition/water, connecting with others, moving, fresh air, and sleep. Take time to review what works for you when it comes to relaxing and recharging. Aim to achieve what's good enough for you and your family, and avoid the pitfalls of comparing yourself to others.

Academic Worries & Parent Support

When COVID-19 hit last spring, it caught all of us off guard. Everyone scrambled to respond, and all these months later things are different. David Hartman, Glenbrook South H.S. Social Worker, explained the schools are ready with rigorous and thoughtful plans.

While there is plenty of emphasis on academics, he also urged parents to help their teens find the balance between academics and social/emotional well-being and to remember this is a global event. "Our community is focused on sending our kids to great schools and we should be," he said, "but it's important to understand that everyone is experiencing the same struggles educationally, and the colleges and universities are going to be ready for that," he said.

In order to maintain that balance, Hartman said parental support is key and offered advice on managing the difficult moments. When your child is experiencing anger, anxiety, and fear, teach them it's ok to have those negative emotions. It's called **distress tolerance**. Then demonstrate how to move forward through **radical acceptance** which is the practice of accepting what we can and can't control.

Encouraging your child to engage both academically and socially is also important. While your child is participating in synchronous learning, they will experience a greater connection to others by checking in with the camera on, emailing their teachers, and of course, doing their homework. Social interaction may look different, but there are still ways to get together safely either digitally or with social distancing. As for sports and activities, some programs may not be available, so this is an opportunity for your child to try something new instead.

Empowering Your Child

As parents, we can take advantage of this moment in history to help our children develop important life skills, said [Kait Berger, LCPC, Youth Services of Glenview/Northbrook](#). When a child is struggling, it's tempting to jump in and solve the problem, but Berger said that's the moment to empower your child by promoting autonomy and self-advocacy. So, when your child is facing a challenge, offer to sit and listen, but don't offer to email the teacher.

Berger shared specific guidance on supporting your child during difficult moments. For example, when your child unloads about their frustrations of remote learning, she suggested this response:

- **Validate:** "Yes, this year is different than last year."
- **Challenge:** "It's your choice how you're going to engage with your learning this year."
- **Partner in problem solving:** "What do you think will be some obstacles for you? What do you think you could do to prepare?"

Asking clarifying questions will help your teen figure out their next step and ultimately give them the skills to problem solve on their own.

School & Community Resources

"We certainly anticipate that this year the needs are going to be just as high if not higher with students needing support, especially as we transition back to school. So we are very ready to help support students through our student services department," said Bridget Bucklin, Glenbrook North H.S. Psychologist.

She explained that both GBN and GBS are implementing a six-week social/emotional curriculum for all students which will cover many of the topics in this program including: resilience, processing emotions related to the pandemic, healthy coping strategies, and staying connected to the community.

If your child needs additional support, Bucklin said the first step is reaching out to the school counselor who can connect your student with resources in the building as well as the community.

Glenbrook School District 225 also offers anonymous methods for students to get support for themselves or a friend. They can send a text message to **the text-a-tip hotline** which is staffed 24/7 by a mental health professional or they can fill out an **anonymous concern form**.

Text **GBNHELP** or **GBSHELP** to **1-844-823-5323**
[Spartan Concern Form](#) [Titan Concern Form](#)

The district also provided these lists of community resources:

[GBS Community Resource Page](#)
[GBN Community Resource Page](#)

A Final Thought...

As we approach the first days of school, Eric Etherton, Glenbrook North H.S. Assistant Principal, Student Services, reminded everyone that, despite the stress and anxiety we feel, the start of each school year is special. "My hope for all of you is that you feel a little bit of excitement and anticipation coming into the school year," he said.

Click to see the slides and recording of this presentation.

View the Q&A segment at 45:50 in the recording when many parents' concerns and questions were addressed.

This webinar was the second in a three-part series presented by CATCH & Glenbrook School District 225.

Many of the lessons from **Part 1: Strategies for Summer** are still relevant as we head into the school year.

Read the summary, view the slides, or watch the recording.

Watch for details about the third part of this webinar series.

Thank you to all of our partners who are collaborating to empower families to raise resilient and independent youth by focusing on mental health and emotional wellness.

CATCH is dedicated to making a difference in our community.

#glenbrooktogetherapart



LET THIS UNIQUE YEAR BE ONE OF GRACE,
GRIT, AND GROWTH FOR OUR STUDENTS.