



Dear Catholic School Families and Personnel,

Through the **Kids Healthy Minds Initiative**, the clinicians at Franciscan Children's have been working to educate parents and teachers about the mental health crisis plaguing our children. In the US, 20% of all youth have a mental health diagnosis; anxiety and depression are the most common problems. The stresses associated with the Covid-19 pandemic can certainly trigger these symptoms or exacerbate symptoms that are already present. And the recent social unrest in our world and uncertainty about returning to school are further compounding these stresses.

These crises affect each of us differently. However, whether you are a teacher implementing new ways of educating our children, a student no longer connected to supports and friends at school or a parent trying to balance school and work while trying to keep your family safe, the challenges are enormous. While the Covid-19 pandemic is preventing us from working with parents and teachers at your schools right now, we want you to know that we are still here to help you – we are just a phone call away.

Attached are two brochures for you to read and save in case you need them.

1. Tip Sheet to help your child or teen cope with current events.
2. A graphic describing the expanded mental health services now available to serve **all family members** with Franciscan Children's new Tele Mental Health Services. Whether conducted by phone, video chat or within one of our parental support networks, our expert clinicians are scheduling appointments for individual counseling, group therapy or medication management. Most insurances are accepted.

This is a challenging time and we can all use a little help. The uncertainties of the upcoming school year and a possible second wave of Covid-19 can be very stressful for all of us, especially for our children. Please take the time to first help yourself by paying attention to your own mental health – you will then be better able to help the children who need you.

Stay well.

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**Many of us have been affected by the events occurring in our communities or the images being shared in the media. Children and adolescents are equally effected and seemingly know what is happening. Whether through peers, social media, or overheard conversations, children and teens are experiencing the consequences of what is currently occurring. Without guidance, they may have difficulty understanding what is happening and navigating their feelings.**

**Below are a few strategies for helping your child or teen cope with current events.**

## 1) TALK TO THEM

The first step in supporting your child or adolescent through a difficult situation is to talk with them about what is happening. Use language that is appropriate for their developmental level and maturity. Books can be a helpful way to start the conversation, especially with young children. For older children and teens, it can be helpful to start the conversation by asking questions, such as "What have you heard about what is happening? How does that make you feel?" By asking questions, you can have an idea of where to start the conversation.

## 2) SET AN EXAMPLE

Set an example and take care of yourself. As a parent, it can seem daunting to talk to children about difficult topics. But don't let fear of making a mistake prevent you from starting the conversation. It will be important to take care of your own emotions and mental health. Vicarious trauma from repeated images in the media is possible so it is critical that parents monitor their own reactions and actively engage in strategies, such as deep breathing, to help manage their own feelings. Be sure that you are in the right state of mind before starting the conversation with your child.

## 3) TAKE THE TIME TO LISTEN

Validate your child's emotional experiences and take the time to listen. Allow your child to express whatever feeling they may be experiencing and be prepared for the range of emotions that may appear, such as sadness, anger, helplessness, or fear. Teach your child ways to manage strong emotions, such as talking with trusted peers and adults, using relaxation techniques, or engaging in advocacy.

## 4) ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY

Encourage your child's curiosity. Your child may have lots of questions, as children and teens are curious about the world around them. Answer questions honestly, and it is okay to say "I don't know." Offer to look up the information, and for you and your child to learn together.

## 5) PREPARE TO FOLLOW UP

Be prepared to follow-up with your child. Conversations should occur on more than one occasion. Check back with your children, which will set you up as a trusted and reliable source of information for your child.

# HERE FOR YOUR KIDS. HERE FOR YOU.

At Franciscan Children's, a leader in pediatric mental health care, our clinicians have been serving the Greater Boston area for over 70 years in both inpatient and outpatient settings. Franciscan Children's is a place for hope and healing for children in crisis, offering expert crisis stabilization, assessment, and inpatient and outpatient mental health treatment in a safe and nurturing environment. Our inpatient programs partner exclusively with McLean Hospital while our outpatient programs have a tremendous presence in the Boston Public School system. **Now, we are proud to have these same skilled clinicians ready to help your family through individual therapy, group counseling and parent support networks.** We understand the stress children and adults have always been facing and are ready to help you navigate the additional anxiety of these unprecedented times.



## BY TELEPHONE

Want support that fits your busy life? Now kids don't have to sit in front of another screen to receive the help they deserve. Franciscan Children's clinicians are available to provide individual and group support **over the phone**. Take advantage of this convenient, non-invasive approach to telehealth.



## ONLINE

If videoconferencing is your preferred method for telehealth needs, we have you covered! Sessions **over your computer or device** allow Franciscan Children's clinicians to both hear and see your child, providing the highest level of care possible. Research shows that in this form, telemedicine can be as effective as in-person sessions with the ability to deliver evidence-based interventions for a range of mental health conditions.



## WITH A PARENTAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Take advantage of Franciscan Children's **Parental Support Networks** to get the compassionate care **YOU** deserve. A new feature in Franciscan Children's telehealth services, our clinicians have created safe, encouraging groups made up of parents just like you! Join **by phone or online** at flexible times that work with your schedule.



Images: Freepik.com and Shutterstock

For more information, or to schedule an appointment today, please call **617-779-1314** or email [info@franciscanchildrens.org](mailto:info@franciscanchildrens.org).

**SAFE. EFFECTIVE. FLEXIBLE. FRANCISCAN.**