



# THE STORM KING SCHOOL

## *Dear Storm King Families,*

In this frightening time where words and phrases like “pandemic,” “social distancing,” “hoarding” and “latest death toll” have become a part of our daily lives, adults and children alike face challenges their mental health. Certainly, the situation also poses some parenting challenges. While your teenager may be saying everything is “fine,” your effort to keep communication open is probably your most important tool for offering support.

While your teen might be verbal and communicative, it is just as likely that s/he might instead internalize stress and fears. If your child is an internalizer, you might look for other signs of their distress such as withdrawal or psycho-somatic complaints including headaches, body aches, and excessive tiredness. Your more expressive teenager might show stress through mood swings, complaining, or temper outbursts with which you may already have some experience.

When talking with your teenager, listen as much as you can without offering judgement but rather reflecting back what you hear; as in “you’re frustrated with all the school work you have to do when you feel so stressed” as opposed to “if you stopped procrastinating, you wouldn’t be so stressed.”

By purposely practicing this approach, you might be surprised by how much your teenager will open up! Sometimes it can be helpful in getting reticent teenagers to open up by offering this ‘backpack’ metaphor: “Imagine that your backpack is full of heavy stones. Each stone represents a worry. When you share a worry with someone, it’s like removing a stone from your bag and your load becomes lighter.”

It is good to keep in mind that your child’s current level of stress could be taxing his/her ability to focus on schoolwork. When we are emotionally stressed, we aren’t able to perform at our best, so keeping things positive in this regard is worth the effort. In light of the situation we are all forced to function under now, perhaps it is wise to adjust our performance expectations a bit.

Be aware of the fact that, like it or not, you are a role model for how to respond to this incredible pandemic stressor. Do your best to refer to this time as a temporary situation, keep a routine, find ways to keep your day balanced between work goals and relaxing self-care activities. Try to comment on any positive events that you see and keep a hopeful attitude.

A special note should be made of the fact that graduating seniors are experiencing a significant loss by not being able to be at school for their final months at SKS. Under normal circumstances, this process is usually a combination of both excitement and celebration in addition to the classic “Senioritis,” as well as a sense of sadness at separating from the place and people who have populated their home away from home— sometimes for several years. While SKS will be making every effort to alleviate this situation to the best degree possible, it is still not the way it was “supposed to be” for seniors as they looked forward to this big milestone. They will need extra support and understanding through this loss.

Below are some ideas for helping all students through this difficult time:

### **Socializing in a Social-Distancing Environment:**

Your teenager is probably more expert than you are in engaging in all of the available social networking and video-gaming technology. So a balanced amount of this (there's the catch!) must be a real lifeline now. Some relaxing of the typical restraint you impose may be necessary in these unusual times, but enforcing no limits invites your child to make poor judgements about isolating themselves, placing possible emotional upset out of view of responsible adults.

That being said, nothing can compare to the actual real-life contact that your family provides. Try to find activities everyday that you can participate in together. Old fashioned board games might be totally new to your teenager! Listening to music, watching movies, doing puzzles, dancing, finding ways to laugh together can all help reduce stress. Hugs! What more can we say about that?!

### **Mindfulness Meditation and Relaxation Exercises:**

Combining [deep breathing exercises](#) with progressive [deep-muscle relaxation](#) is good to practice on a regular basis.

Now is a perfect time to begin a regular practice of mindfulness meditation. There is ample evidence to support the effectiveness of meditation for reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. A number of SKS students have learned these skills from their Q-Term and other classroom experiences. The American Psychological Association recommends the [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#) apps for those who may not have had these experiences.

### **Physical Exercise:**

While physical exercise in the form of team sports is not possible right now, activity such as hiking, bicycling, running, etc. can be a major stress busters and mood boosters. Try not to be too restrictive with your child about engaging in these activities, especially if you can trust that they will be responsible to keep appropriate physical distance. Showing your child this trust, if warranted, rewards them for their demonstrated responsibility and helps them build self-assurance and esteem. Any of these can be good family activity as well.

Any SKS parents who have concerns about their particular student's adjustment to the pandemic can feel free to reach out to Dr. Regis and Dr. Guido by e-mail at: [samm42002@yahoo.com](mailto:samm42002@yahoo.com). We will be happy to arrange an opportunity to consult with parents by e-mail or by FaceTime throughout the remainder of the school year.

***Sincerely,***

Dr. Mark Guido and Dr. Sandy Regis  
[samm42002@yahoo.com](mailto:samm42002@yahoo.com)