TRENDS

SUPPORTING STUDENTS REMOTELY DURING COVID19

Prior to the pandemic, mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety were on the increase among children and youth ages 6 to 17. In response to COVID19 young people may be experiencing new mental health concerns, such as increased feelings of loneliness and social isolation or interpersonal difficulties with family members. Students may also be experiencing what looks like real grief, regardless of whether a loved one is sick or has died – the grief for a past that may never return as well as worries about a future that remains uncertain.

Students, especially those with prior traumatic experiences but also those without, may need help recognizing certain symptoms (e.g., guilt, shame, mood swings, hopelessness, difficulty concentrating) as part of a trauma or grief process related to the pandemic. It is important for educators to validate these feelings and continue to focus on ways that students can continue to lead fulfilling lives. Behavioral activation (engaging in experiences that help increase positive emotion), mindfulness, and thought monitoring are all skills that educators can deploy remotely to help students manage these potentially new experiences during this difficult time.

Additionally, students and their families may also be experiencing unemployment or furloughs, school difficulties, front line jobs that put their health and safety at risk, and general uncertainty of their future. School professionals, now more than ever, may need to be educated about community resources and help connect students with additional services to help them with these new needs.

Students, families and educators are adjusting to the on-line environment for learning and support services. Experience suggests that some youth respond as well to on-line formats like Zoom as well as they do to traditional face to face case management meetings and counseling sessions. Whether educators are working in the face to face or on-line environment, it is still essential to develop trusting supportive relationships and provide safe (confidential), welcoming on-line environments. The following are some suggestions for effective remote supports and increasing comfort and confidence for students.

Create a welcoming environment: If there are objects in your home or office that might be helpful for students to feel more comfortable with on-line support or can be tools in therapy, use them. If you have a household pet, introduce the child to your pet and let him/her see you provide the pet with affection and care.

Pay attention to a student's posture, movements and facial expressions: It may be more difficult to see changes in body posture and other nonverbal expressions (e.g., nervous foot tapping) over video. Explicitly asking students to talk about how their body is responding to difficult subjects can help provide more information.

Use Screen Sharing: You can share a Word document with students from your computer screen as you work on an activity or share a video from the Internet that might be helpful to watch together. You can also allow students to share their screens with you if helpful.

Use the chat feature: If a student wants to express something particularly sensitive or difficult about the people they live with, they can message you directly through a chat feature on web conferencing software. This feature may also be useful if you want to send a client a quick website link or share other quick information that is easier to write in a chat box. Just remind students to copy any important information they want to keep after the session ends somewhere else.

Have a sense of humor when you encounter technical difficulties: Frustrating technical difficulties are inevitable as we transition to the remote work environment. If your video session freezes or you accidentally log off, you can use humor to help students feel more comfortable.

Telephone is an option when needed: Remind students that they can call into a secure phone line rather than using a webservice like Zoom, especially if technical difficulties become insurmountable.

To learn more:

- https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/social-emotional-learning-should-be-priority-during-covid-19
- https://www.nj.gov/education/covid19/studentsfamilies/wellness.shtml

CORNERSTONE DAY SCHOOL

"Integrating state of the art psychiatric treatment and outstanding academics within a dynamic school environment."

TRENDS • December 2020

Cornerstone Day School • 10-12 Commerce Drive, Cranford, NJ 07016 • Phone 908-543-0220 • Fax 908-543-0222 • **www.cornerstonedayschool.com**