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MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS FROM A MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT

Since a lot of things will not be normal in the upcoming months, it is important to keep the things we can control normal (routines, expectations, schedules). Focusing on what you can control will help you and your kids feel calmer. One thing we can control is our thoughts and our reactions to situations. Sometimes we have to train our brains to focus on the positive. One of the number one predictors of success in school is a child's healthy sense of optimism (Brigman & Webb, 2010). If we can turn our pessimistic thinking into optimistic thinking it will impact our feelings and, ultimately, our actions. This is an ongoing feedback loop (see diagram below). Make an effort to restructure your irrational thinking ("nothing good EVER happens to me") and replace it with more rational thinking ("What can I learn from this challenging event?"). Once you are able to master this yourself you can model it and teach it to your students/child(ren). You will be amazed at how much faster you are able to bounce back with more optimistic thinking. Here are some tips for you to practice and teach your child(ren)/students for managing uncertain times:

- Think about what is in your control and shift your focus to what is in your immediate arsenal for helping (yourself or others).
- Start a gratitude journal. It will help improve self-esteem, understanding of others and optimism.
- Practice self-care (exercise and sleep are two productive ways to feel better about uncertainty and have a multitude of other health benefits).
- Take time to breathe. When was the last time you took a deep belly breath? Set an alarm on your phone.
- Avoid anxious self-talk.
- Try to communicate excitement about returning to school in whatever form it may be.
- Create a "Think Space" or "Calm Place" in your classroom/home with resources for children to calm down and think (e.g., glitter wand, stress ball, Play-Doh, crayons/paper, feelings chart, social stories, etc.).

Resources:

Brigman, G., & Webb, L. (2010). Student Success Skills: Classroom manual (3rd ed.). Boca Raton, FL: Atlantic Education Consultants.

Think Space: Educating the Heart and the Mind for Success in the Classroom and Beyond
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV1-vnAvsAo>

Therapist Aid: Thoughts, Feeling and Actions
<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/cbt-for-kids.pdf>



SIGNS OF STRESS

As you are providing support for your youngster, be sure to notice any significant changes in behavior, affect, demeanor, etc. and refer as necessary. As always, if you are concerned about harm to self or others, increase supervision and report as required by your state. For emergency situations call 9-1-1. According to Poland (2020), your child/student may need additional support if they exhibit these signs of stress:

- Excessive stress or worry
- Feeling “on edge”
- Changes in appetite, energy or activity levels
- Sleeping problems
- Concentration problems
- Increased irritability
- Increased drug and alcohol use
- Thoughts of hopelessness or suicide

Resource:

Poland, S. (2020, June 12). *COVID-19: School Re-entry...Promoting Social and Emotional Wellness*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&reload=9&v=C6Sb1vVD8RU&feature=youtu.be>

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:

1-800-273-TALK (8255) [24/7 Hotline]

1-888-628-9454 (Spanish)

1-800-799-4889 (TTY)

Crisis Text Line:

Text “MHFA” to 741741 to speak with a compassionate, trained crisis counselor, a volunteer who has been trained to help with problem-solving and will address the caller’s situation.