

Talking About COVID-19

Parenting doesn't come with a manual, and parenting through a pandemic is a new experience for most of us! Each week I hope to use this newsletter to offer updates, helpful resources and hopeful stories to remind us that we have each other, and our wellness matters.

I have heard many of our fellow SD.22 staff, students and families find feelings of hope, gratitude and connection even amidst the flurry of change and uncertainty

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The Ultimate Feelings Wheel

Work your way from the inside out

Where's the Manual?

Responding to kids about COVID-19 When there are More Questions than Answers

We've all been there. We know questions are coming about an important topic. We want our answers to provide comfort, yet we worry we won't know what to say to help.

We can start by viewing COVID-19 as a storm we are watching from our window. We might all react a bit differently when there is a storm. Some of us might be curious and want to watch and listen to the lightening and thunder. Others of us might want to hide under our blankets and wait for it to pass! COVID-19 and storms have a few things in common.

Both are beyond our control, and bring with them uncertainty. Because of this, our body and mind might be anxious, worried or scared right now. Whether during play, or in "real life" our brain uses a special system to try to keep us safe. It uses some guesswork and tries different ways of doing so.

Sometimes when we are scared we move towards the threat, like when we speak out to stop someone from being mean to our friend. During a game of tag we run from the "it" person, taking us away from the threat. When we play hide and seek we quiet our voice and footsteps and hold very still when we hear the seeker near, so that we stop and hopefully go unnoticed by the threat.

In the case of a storm outside our window or COVID-19 in our communities, our brain might not know how best to keep us safe. Our safety systems are like different brands of smoke

detectors. Some are more sensitive to smoke than others.

In some of my past homes blackened toast wouldn't set off the alarm. In others just frying up pancakes on high heat would leave me running for the tea towel and opening all of the doors.

Unlike a real smoke detector, our past experiences impact how sensitive our safety system is. For example, the more our brain's safety system has been used in the past, the more sensitive to possible danger it generally becomes. That can mean that the more stress we have been through, the more our safety systems might be on right now.

Our brain isn't as good at controlling our behaviour when we are in situations that have our safety system on alert. Learning how to calm our safety systems together as a family gives us a way of understanding each other's experiences. It helps us to better manage what is happening inside of us and around us.

Side note: You may have heard of the safety system referred to as our "fight" "flight" and "freeze" responses. This is a valuable way of explaining our safety/survival responses to older children and youth. You can decide what wording you feel best for your household.

TRY THIS- Similar to the game "I spy" help calm your safety systems as a family by taking turns finding:

5 things that you see

4 things that you hear

3 things that you feel

2 things that you smell

1 thing that you taste

No one is too old for this game! It can help people of all ages manage anxiety, panic and worry.

4 Step Response to COVID-19

1. **NORMALIZE** that our body and brain do not read this situation as normal because it's not! Try using comparisons to things that are familiar, such as the storm example above. Let them know that this is new for all of us and we are all learning together as we go.

2. **EXPLAIN** that how our safety system works (as described above), and let them know that the feelings we all have might be unfamiliar and confusing.

3. **INQUIRE** by asking questions to help them talk about what this pandemic is like for them.

4. **VALIDATE** their answers by repeating back to them what you hear them saying. Resist the urge to calm their fears by telling them not to worry. Instead, show you understand them by telling them **WHY** their concerns make sense to you.

For example:

"I can see why you worry you'll never see your friends again because we don't know when this will end" or "I hear you when you say being home all the time is hard for you and I get that because you really want to be out more."

Explain that our brain is getting confusing messages on how best to keep us safe from COVID-19. Like playing a video game with a sticky joystick, our brain might be getting mixed signals on which way to move and so it might be jumping between modes such as forward, backward and stop...



Using the word "because" when responding to COVID-19 related distractions and concerns is key.

It sends the message that you are listening to understand. This can take kids and adults alike, switch off their safety system and move into a new more positive and open mindset.



Stay Calm & Collected with a

LAVENDER CHAMOMILE LATTE

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups milk
- 1 tbsp loose leaf chamomile or 2 chamomile tea bags
- 2 tsp honey
- 1 tsp dried lavender
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, heat milk until very hot, but not boiling.
2. Once milk is hot, turn the heat down to low and add in all other ingredients. Let steep for 7-10 minutes before straining into a mug.

<https://mildlymeandering.com/lavender-chamomile-latte/>

This Week's Feature Wellness App

Sleep Cycle: Sleep Analysis & Smart Alarm Clock

Lack of sleep seems to be a common struggle for children and adults alike these days. This app is available for on Iphone, Android and Huawei. You set a window of time that you need to wake up in, and it chooses the best moment to wake you based on your sleep cycles. You get valuable information about your sleep patterns, and you don't need to get MORE sleep to feel rested by waking up at the RIGHT time. <https://www.sleepcycle.com/>

Feelings Wheel

Gone are the days of the robotic "Hi, how are you?" with the classic "I'm good thanks." When people are checking in these days, it feels real. Responses seem to be getting more honest as well. People have been willing to share the challenges and dips they are facing, even with complete strangers in the grocery store lineup!

Finding the right words to describe our experience is key in keeping us connected. In order to talk about, and sometimes even make sense of our feelings, we need to be able to name them.

To use this wheel just start from the center with the simpler emotions to name, and work your way outwards to the more specific ones. (see wheel on p. 9). If you're not sure what something means, feel welcome to skip it, Google it, look it up in a dictionary, or take turns guessing until you can ask someone that might know!

