

Supporting Student Mental Health from a Distance

John Ackerman, PhD
Suicide Prevention Coordinator
Center for Suicide Prevention and Research



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Webinar Objectives

- Describe the emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff and families
- Identify effective strategies for managing anxiety and distress during isolation
- Ways staff can engage with families to foster engagement and resilience

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COVID-19: Emotional Impact

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COVID-19: A pandemic

- This is a novel experience and much is still uncertain
- Virus is not visible, so it can be hard to picture the risk
- People have become very sick, and some have died
- Changing the way each person's lives look
 - Daily activities, socialization, schedules
- Changing the way the world looks

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Stress + grief are expected and normal

► Let's talk about what stress, grief, and mood disorders look like to provide a framework for how you can support yourself and others.



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Stress

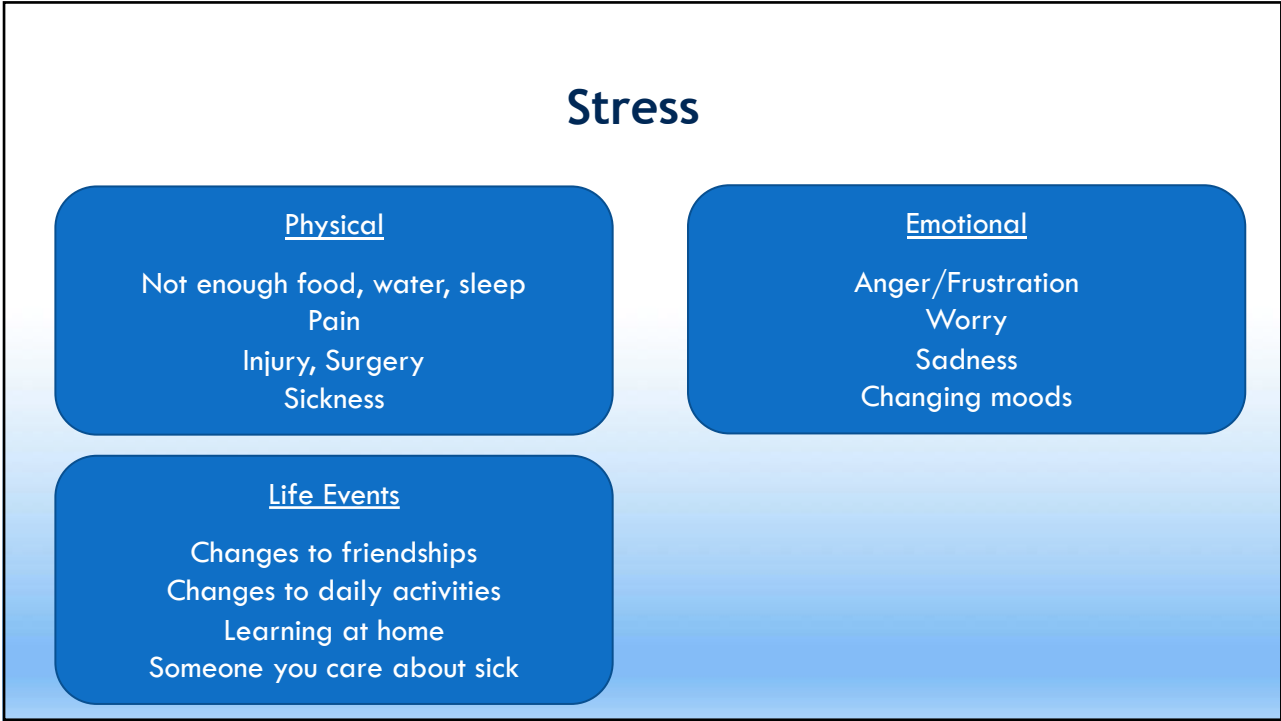
Physical

Not enough food, water, sleep
Pain
Injury, Surgery
Sickness

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Stress

Physical

Not enough food, water, sleep
Pain
Injury, Surgery
Sickness

Emotional

Anger/Frustration
Worry
Sadness
Changing moods

Life Events

Changes to friendships
Changes to daily activities
Learning at home
Someone you care about sick

Cognitive

Memory
Attention and Concentration
Comprehension
Negative thoughts

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Grief

- ▶ A natural reaction to loss. Losses can be
 - A person
 - A relationship
 - An object
 - An event
 - A feeling
- ▶ Can be experienced immediately or delayed
- ▶ Grief can be even more difficult when one feels they are not supposed to express their grief

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Stress and Grief Can Be Expressed In Many Ways:

- Crying
- Anger
- Hostility
- Laughing
- Withdrawal
- Avoidance
- Physical symptoms
- Very intense focus
- Unable to concentrate
- Loss of interest
- Repetitive language
- Rapid changes of mood

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Depression

- Sad or irritable mood
- Less interest or loss of pleasure in almost all activities
- Changes to appetite and/or eating
- Changes to sleep patterns
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling worthlessness or like a burden
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or understanding
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Anxiety

- Excessive worry about a variety of topics or activities
- The worry is experienced as very challenging to control
- Physical or cognitive symptoms
 - Edginess or restlessness
 - Fatigued and tired
 - Impaired concentration or feeling as though the mind goes blank
 - Irritability
 - Increased muscle aches or soreness
 - Difficulty sleeping

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When to Reach Out for Additional Support

- ▶ During a pandemic, many people report difficulty sleeping, more worries, being more irritable, and feeling less interested in doing things they used to like to do.
- ▶ A decision to reach out for professional support is based on whether day to day functions are impaired and how much distress is caused to the person.
- ▶ Additionally, if there is increased risk of self-directed harm, suicide, or serious aggression, it is important to reach out for further assessment.

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Common question: Will Youth Suicide Rates Increase in Response?

April 10, 2020

Suicide Mortality and Coronavirus Disease 2019—A Perfect Storm?

Mark A. Reger, PhD^{1,2}; Ian H. Stanley, MS^{1,3}; Thomas E. Joiner, PhD³

[▶ Author Affiliations](#) | [Article Information](#)

JAMA Psychiatry. Published online April 10, 2020. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.1060

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Reasons Youth Suicide Could Increase

- Social isolation and reduced community support
- Heightened anxiety and uncertainty
- Economic stress
- Trauma and loss
- Reduced access to (mental) healthcare
- Increases in firearm sales
- Loss of milestones, routines, opportunities

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Reasons Youth Suicide Could Decrease

- Novel opportunities to increase social connection through technology
- Tele-mental health options have increased
- Options to create new routines that make routines and mental health a priority
- After prior natural disasters, there has been a temporary reduction in suicides
- Shared impact of a global health crisis

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Warning Signs

- ▶ A **warning sign** is an indication that an individual may be experiencing depression or thoughts of suicide.
 - ▶ Most individuals who attempt suicide give warning signs or signals of their intentions
- ▶ **Seek Immediate Help**
 - ▶ Threat to kill themselves, actively seeking lethal means, talking/writing about death in school or social media

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Other Warning Signs to Take Seriously

- Increased isolation
- Giving away possessions
- Obtaining a weapon or means of self-harm
- Risky behavior, recklessness, self-injury
- ↑ substance use
- ↓ interest in usual activities



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Enhance Protective Factors



Increase teacher and family support



Foster positive social and school activities



Advocate for a therapeutic relationship



Enhance coping and problem-solving skills



Focus on values and reasons for living



Reduce access to lethal means



Implement a clear safety plan if needed

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Increase Awareness of Crisis Resources

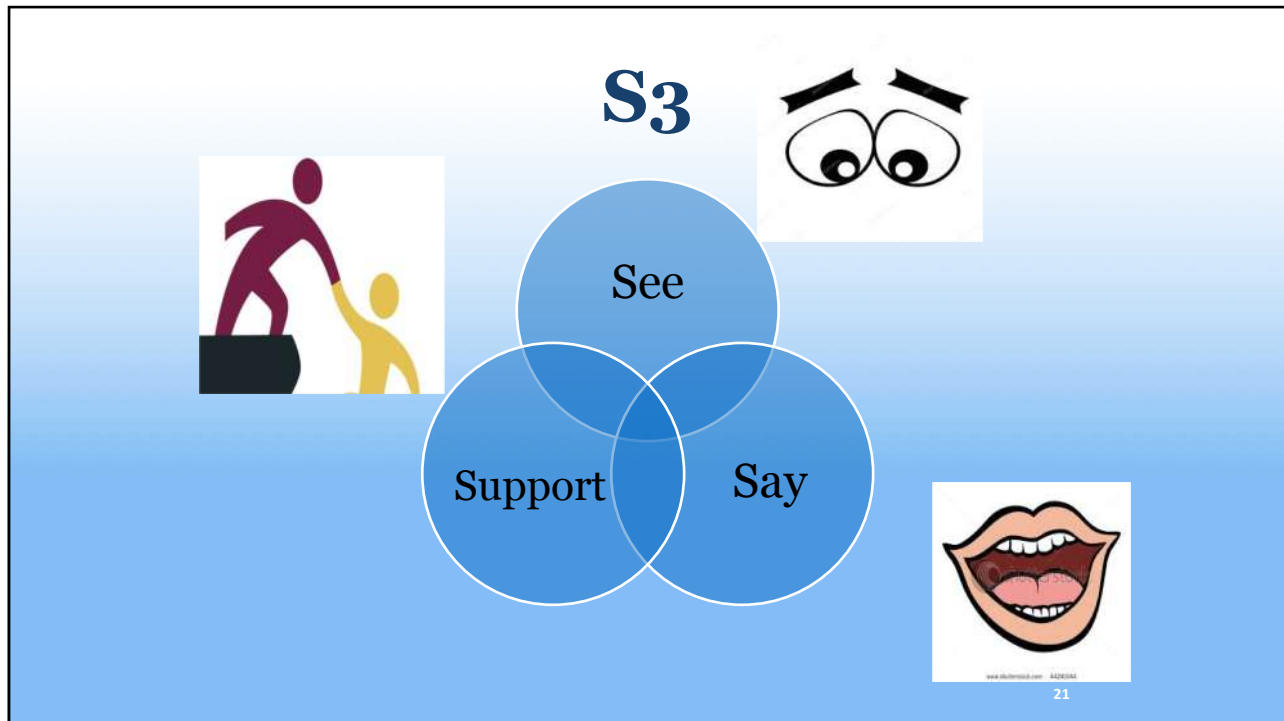
- Have youth take a picture of it so it is always with them or download an app with these resources
- Consider practice calling local or national crisis line and/or texting Crisis Text Line
- Where will they put this at home? Accessible?



CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Text **ACT** to 741741.

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Helpful Ways to Address Youth

- **ALWAYS** take youth seriously when they make a remark - no matter what their age.
- Look for warning signs (behavior problems, signs of depression, irritability, impulsivity, risky/dangerous acts)
- **Be DIRECT**
 - “Are you doing this to kill yourself?”
 - “Do you ever wish you weren’t alive?”
 - “Do things ever get so bad that you want to die?”

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Taking Care of Ourselves During and After a Pandemic

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Paying Attention To You First

▶ To best support the children, we also need to pay attention to how we are coping.

- ▶ 1. If you are in a better mental headspace, you can better attend and be present for others
- ▶ 2. Children notice when we recommend they use coping strategies that they can tell we have not used

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Are You Taking Your Own Advice?

Physical

Eating well balanced meals
Hydrating
Maintaining a sleep schedule
Exercising, Relaxation

Emotional

Talking about your worries
Paying attention to the good

Life Events

Scheduling virtual hangouts
Enjoyable home activities
Keeping to a Routine

Cognitive

Being purposeful
Being present
Being realistic

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Caregiver Burden



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Taking Care of Others During and After a Pandemic: Opening the Conversation

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How Do We Help Others Achieve This?



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Get Them To Talk

- Many children may believe they shouldn't show their emotions to "be strong."
- Research has shown that addressing negative emotional states reduces the overall intensity and longevity.
- Be specific with check-ins. Ask questions that can't be answered with "yes/no" or "IDK"
 - "What worries you about COVID-19?"
 - "How has this experience changed your daily life? Changed you?"
 - "Tell me what has been the hardest part of this month..."

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Sit In That Space



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Coach Them In Self-Care

- ▶ Help them decide what they could try to do that will help



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Be The Change

- ▶ You mean the world to these children, and it helps to know someone is thinking about them.
 - ▶ “I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately. Tell me what it has been like...”
 - ▶ “I just wanted to send this funny picture, it made me think of you. Missing our time together.”
 - ▶ “I wondered if you have been worried about your grandma, I know how close you two are...”

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Let Their Story Be The Most Important

- ▶ Kids tend to focus on how large-scale events impact them
 - ▶ I'm missing the basketball game on Saturday
 - ▶ I was supposed to be in the school play
- ▶ Kids are supposed to be focused on school, friends, and sports.
- ▶ Empathize & validate, then move to how they can DO something about the situation

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Addressing Uncertainty

- Make informed decisions about what children need to know to feel safe (differs by age)
- Create an environment where children can ask questions that matter to them
- Let children know they are going to be safe and you will take steps to stay safe too
- Encourage compassion for vulnerable people
- Emphasize that getting sick is part of being human; we all need to help each other feel safe

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Strategies for Managing Anxiety and Distress

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Social Distancing

**Physical Distancing +
Social Solidarity ✓**

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Strategies for Managing Anxiety and Distress

- ▶ Youth need to address basic needs first which include:
 - Food, shelter, physical safety
 - Yet, emotional wellness is critical to health and requires:
 - Emotional support and connection
 - Routine, purpose
 - Control and predictability
 - Meaning and hope

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Strategies for Managing Anxiety and Distress

- Building connections when isolated helps increase:
 - Sense of belonging and self-worth
 - Mood and energy
 - Ability to cope with adversity
- Youth should prioritize connection despite keeping distance
 - Plan regular times to connect with and without technology
 - Maintain rituals and shared activities if possible
 - Don't assume "out of sight" means "out of mind" - be proactive!
 - Create new traditions and shared meaning

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Tackling Unpredictability through Routines

- Many routines have been disrupted by this pandemic.
- Help youth build a routine that works for them and includes:
 - Set wake/sleep time
 - Set meal/snack times
 - Time for school work (if applicable)
 - Time for connectivity
 - Time for activity

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Use of Social Media/Technology

- Now, more than ever, remaining connected is important
- Social media and technology can be a helpful tool in staying connected
- Encourage youth to use social media and technology to connect with **people known to them**
- Additionally, social media use should be:
 - Moderated to make sure it is not excessive or inappropriate
 - Used for connection, not comparison to others
 - From safe and credible sources

(SAVE 2020)

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Getting/Staying Active

- Being physically active can prevent or reduce some MH symptoms
- Requires creativity with current limits
 - Riding a bike or going for a run
 - Taking the dog for a walk
 - Doing yardwork/gardening
 - Push-up's, sit-up's, working out
 - Lots of free classes, videos
- Experiment rather than prescribe!



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Distraction

- ▶ During a crisis distraction can be helpful



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Conclusions

- We are experiencing a new and disruptive pandemic. Change and intense emotions are to be expected.
- Physical distance is a priority but so is social connection!
- Caregivers and staff should prioritize self-care and modify expectations.
- Many resources and strategies exist for youth and adults.
- Treatment may look different but is still effective.
- Staff engagement now helps youth in the future.
- Thank you for being one of the helpers!

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FRED ROGERS CENTER
for early learning and children's media
at Saint Vincent College

"At many times throughout their lives, children will feel the world has turned topsy-turvy. It's not the ever-present smile that will help them feel secure. It's knowing that love can hold many feelings, including sadness, and that they can count on the people they love to be with them until the world turns right side up again."

- Fred Rogers

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Please Don't Hesitate To Reach Out with Questions

- ▶ John Ackerman, PhD
Suicide Prevention Coordinator
Nationwide Children's Hospital
John.Ackerman@nationwidechildrens.org
- ▶ Special thanks to the following for supporting this presentation:
 - ▶ Kam Twymon, LPCC, MBA
 - ▶ Nicole Dempster, PhD

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Resources:

- ▶ [On Our Sleeves](#)
- ▶ <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/giving/on-our-sleeves>



Behavioral Health Resources for Coronavirus
We have expert resources and guides to help you manage life during coronavirus.
[Learn More](#)

How to Talk to Your Kids About Mental Health
Here are tips for approaching difficult topics and initiating a healthy rapport with your child that will last a lifetime.
[Learn More](#)

Managing Indoor Boredom
Your guide to fighting indoor boredom.
[Learn More](#)



Growing our Gratitude
Research shows that people who practice gratitude and think about the good things in their lives are healthier and happier!
Join us and complete our "Growing Our Gratitude" activity and receive gratitude seeds you can plant and watch grow with your family at home!
[Get Seeds!](#)

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More Suicide Prevention Resources:

▶ Ohio

- ▶ <http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/suicide-research>
- ▶ <https://franklincountyspc.org/>
- ▶ <http://www.ohiospf.org/>
- ▶ <https://losscs.org/>
- ▶ <https://mhaohio.org/>
- ▶ <https://mha.ohio.gov/Families-Children-and-Adults/Suicide-Prevention>

▶ Apps for Teens

- ▶ My3
- ▶ Virtual Hopebox
- ▶ Mindshift

National

- <http://www.sprc.org/>
- <http://afsp.org/>
- <https://www.suicidology.org>
- <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- Spanish Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-877-727-4747
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text "4HOPE" to 741-741
- Signs of Suicide (SOS)
<https://www.mindwise.org/>

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Caregiver and Teacher Resources

- ▶ <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/03/school-closings-cancelled-plans>
- ▶ <https://mhctnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-mhct/resources-parents-and-caregivers-covid-19>
- ▶ <https://chadd.org/resilience-and-routines-for-families-during-the-pandemic/>
- ▶ <https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>
- ▶ <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/03/helping-children-cope-coronavirus-and-uncertainty>
- ▶ <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/COVID-19-Resources/>
- ▶ https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- ▶ <https://www.mindwise.org/covid-19/>

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