Supporting Student Mental Health from a Distance

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

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
COVID-19: Emotional Impact

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
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.

Stress

Physical
- Not enough food, water, sleep
- Pain
- Injury, Surgery
- Sickness
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Emotional
- Anger/Frustration
- Worry
- Sadness
- Changing moods

Life Events
- Changes to friendships
- Changes to daily activities
- Learning at home
- Someone you care about sick
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**Cognitive**
- Memory
- Attention and Concentration
- Comprehension
- Negative thoughts

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
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

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
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.

Common question: Will Youth Suicide Rates Increase in Response?

April 10, 2020

Suicide Mortality and Coronavirus Disease 2019—A Perfect Storm?

Mark A. Regier, PhD; Ian H. Sterling, MS; Thomas E. Joiner, PhD

Author Affiliations | Article Information
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

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
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

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
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

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?

Text ACT to 741741.
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?”
Taking Care of Ourselves During and After a Pandemic

Paying Attention To You First

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.
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

Caregiver Burden

*THE INVISIBLE LOAD OF MOTHERHOOD: COVID EDITION*

YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST.
Taking Care of Others During and After a Pandemic: Opening the Conversation

How Do We Help Others Achieve This?
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...”

Sit In That Space

Affirmation

- finding-good
- affirming-others
- genuine
- builds-self-esteem
- builds-trust
- self-respect
- positive
- good-in-self
- set-the-tone
- positive-environment
- what-I-like-about-myself
- being-acknowledged
- builds-positive-tone
- supportive
- no-put-downs
Coach Them In Self-Care

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

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...”
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

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
Strategies for Managing Anxiety and Distress

Social Distancing

Physical Distancing + Social Solidarity ✓
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

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
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

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)
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!

Distraction

- During a crisis distraction can be helpful
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!
Please Don’t Hesitate To Reach Out with Questions

- John Ackerman, PhD
  Suicide Prevention Coordinator
  Nationwide Children’s Hospital
  John.Ackerman@nationwidechildrens.org

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Resources:

- On Our Sleeves
  https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/giving/on-our-sleeves
More Suicide Prevention Resources:

**Ohio**
- [http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/suicide-research](http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/suicide-research)
- [https://franklincountyspc.org/](https://franklincountyspc.org/)
- [https://losscs.org/](https://losscs.org/)
- [https://mhaohio.org/](https://mhaohio.org/)
- [https://mha.ohio.gov/Families-Children-and-Adults/Suicide-Prevention](https://mha.ohio.gov/Families-Children-and-Adults/Suicide-Prevention)

**Apps for Teens**
- My3
- Virtual Hopebox
- Mindshift

**National**
- [https://www.suicidology.org](https://www.suicidology.org)
- [http://www.thetrevorproject.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/](https://www.mindwise.org/)

Caregiver and Teacher Resources

- [https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/03/school-closings-cancelled-plans](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/03/school-closings-cancelled-plans)
- [https://childmind.org/copin during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/](https://childmind.org/copin during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/)
- [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf)
- [https://www.mindwise.org/covid-19/](https://www.mindwise.org/covid-19/)