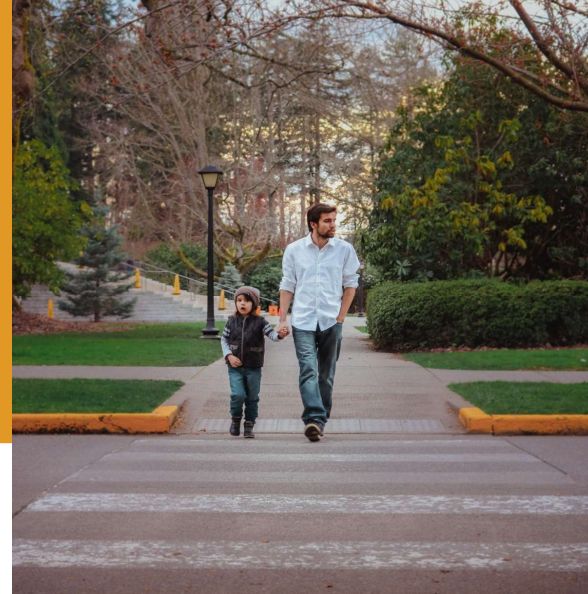
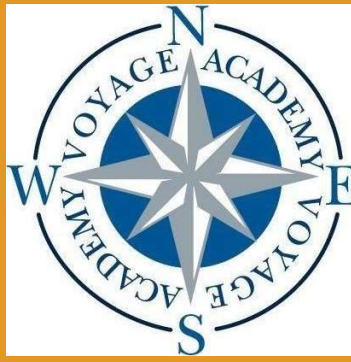


COUNSELING CORNER



October 2020

Parenting in a Pandemic

Protecting our Kids' Mental Health

It is safe to say that parenting on its best day isn't always easy, and parenting in the middle of a pandemic poses even more challenges. As parents you are not exempt from bad days at work, money worries, a fight with your partner or even bad traffic when you are already running late. Life is full of big and small stresses. Even when we do our best to hide our challenges, our kids generally know that something is up. Kids are particularly sensitive to their parents' moods. This does not mean that we, as parents, shouldn't show our emotions, but it does mean that we should be mindful in how we manage them.

Kids won't always see their parents calm and happy, and that's okay. Stress, sadness, frustration, and other negative emotions are a normal part of life. It is good for children to see these emotions in their parents, but it is important that parents model how to deal with stress in healthy ways.

Stress that is not managed can build up and affect how you interact with your children. You might snap at them more frequently or desire to spend less time with them. Stress that is ongoing can wipe out your patience and the energy it takes to be a nurturing and engaged parent.

As a parent it is easy to let our worries and fears of the unknown show, which can make it tough for families to keep a sense of calm. Parenting in a Pandemic is a particularly challenging time as there is a sense of fear and uncertainty that even as parents, we have not experienced before. It is important to help children feel safe, maintain healthy routines, manage their behavior, and build resilience.

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Help yourself and them, by learning healthy ways to manage stress

Witnessing a parent in a state of anxiety can be more than just momentarily unsettling for a child.

Kids look to their parents for information about how to interpret ambiguous situations; if a parent seems consistently anxious and fearful, the child will determine that a variety of scenarios are unsafe.

Children of anxious parents are more likely to exhibit anxiety themselves. Manage your own stress as effectively as possible and help your kids to manage theirs.

Some suggestions to avoid passing your stress onto your kids are:

- Learn stress management techniques
- Model stress tolerance
- Explain your anxiety
- Make a plan
- Know when to disengage
- Practice regular self-care
- Find a support system

Tips to keep the calm at home

Address children's fears- Children rely on their parents for physical and emotional safety. Reassure your child that you are there for them and will get through this together. Recognize their fears and validate them. Answer questions they have about the pandemic simply and honestly. Always reassure children of the things they are in control of when they feel a loss of control in their environment. Model how to manage feelings by talking through how you are managing your own. Explain your thought process and how you can resolve worries by thinking through the steps you can take that you can control. Tell your child before you leave the home where you are going, how long you will be gone, when you will return and that you are taking steps to be safe. Reassure your child that scientists are working hard to figure out how to help people that get ill and that things will get better. Offer extra hugs and affection to your child to assure them they are safe and loved.

Keep healthy routines- Maintaining bedtime and other routines is crucial during a pandemic. Routines create a sense of order to the day that offers reassurance at a very uncertain time. All children benefit from routines that are predictable yet flexible enough to meet individual needs. Maintaining a routine for bedtime is essential as too little sleep makes it more challenging to learn and deal with emotions.

Use positive discipline- Everyone feels more anxious and worried during a pandemic because it is a new territory for all. Younger children may not have the words to describe their feelings and are more likely to act out their stress, anxiety or fear through their behavior (which can in turn, upset parents, particularly if they are already stressed). Older children and teens may be extra irritable as they miss out on time

with their friends and special events that are being canceled. Help your children to manage their emotions and behavior by redirecting their bad behavior, using creative play, direct your attention to reinforce good behaviors and discourage others, use rewards and privileges to reinforce good behaviors, know when not to respond to bad behavior, and use time-outs when needed.

Special time in- Though families are spending more time home together, set aside some special time with each child. You choose the time and let your child choose the activity. Even 10 or 20 minutes of undivided attention will make a huge difference in your child. Set aside time that you can silence your phone, so you are free from distraction. Remember to avoid physical punishment as it is not effective and can increase aggression in children. Take care of yourself and practice regular self-care by taking breaks and finding ways to decompress. Remember to stop and take a breath. When you feel overwhelmed take a few seconds to ask yourself these questions: Does the problem pose an immediate danger? How will I feel about this problem tomorrow? Is this situation permanent? In many cases, the answers will deflate the panic and the impulse to lash out physically or verbally at children.



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Counseling services available for online and in person students by appointment only.



ALL EMOTIONS ARE OKAY

One thing kids need to hear on repeat is that all emotions are okay. There is no right or wrong way to feel about this global pandemic. Parents should get in the habit of checking in with each child individually each day to give them an opportunity to verbalize their feelings and talk about triggers.



Resilience Is Strength: Kids Can Bounce Back from Anything with the Right Support

What's happening with Covid-19 is stressful in too many ways to count and there is no doubt that kids are impacted by all of it. Routines have been interrupted and suddenly children are having to adapt to a new normal. Kids are also perceptive which means that they can't help but pick up on the anxiety of the adults around them, even when we try our best to hide it.

Despite how toxic the stress surrounding Covid-19 can be, there is good news: We can help our kids be resilient, even during these unusual times. There are many keys to resilience: Connection- children need meaningful ways to stay connected to others- especially supportive adults, Routine- provide a sense of safety, control and predictability, Self-care- children are more resilient when they can tune into their feelings and learn to manage worry in a safe and healthy way, Self-efficacy- when children have a feeling of "I can do this", they turn challenges into opportunities for growth which helps develop self-esteem, Family- traditions are a foundation for hope and reassurance that give children connection and stability, Mindfulness- learning to focus on the present moment enhances stress management skills and the ability to adapt to change, and Play- is fundamental to how all children learn. It allows kids to make mistakes in a safe environment and to develop problem solving skills.

Resilience is a skill you can help your child build. Kids need the tools and confidence to solve problems and overcome challenges. Resilience can be strengthened with time. Support children from the outside until they can stand on their own. This support starts at home with our attitude about things going on around us. If we tell kids they will be okay, they believe us. If we tell them that wearing a mask is something they can do, they will believe us. But on the flipside, if we tell kids that it is too hard or that a rule is silly, your child is going to believe this too. As parents we hold the power to teach our children how to be resilient. Children follow our lead, especially when facing new territory. Be mindful of your approach to new situations and challenges, as your little ones are watching and will respond as you do.

The single most important factor in a child's resilience is having at least one strong, stable and supportive relationship with an adult. Someday this pandemic will be over and when you and your child look back on it, you may discover that you have an amazing ability to make it through tough times. You can do this, and so can your little ones! Parents we can do this!