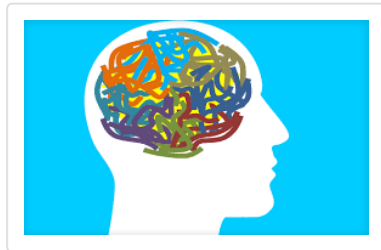


Students' Mental Health & COVID-19:

A LETTER FOR PARENTS



Mental Health Crisis: What are some of our students experiencing?

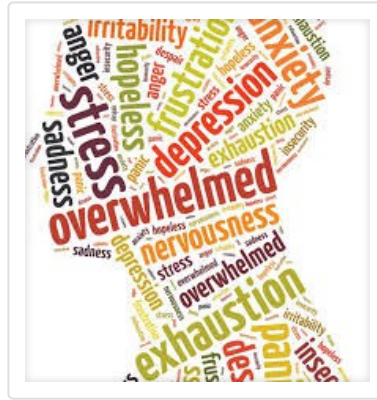
COVID-19 seems to be impacting our student's mental and emotional health. With increased isolation, screen time and stress this can lead to problems such as anxiety, aggression, depression, suicidal thoughts, physical illness, and poor coping skills. It is important to remember that students are taking cues from adults in their life as we cope through these stressful times. Often times, our younger generations mimic how others around them respond. If we are having a difficult time managing our stress, our students likely will as well. Letting our students know that it is okay to struggle creates a safe space needed for them to talk about what they are struggling with.

National 4-H Council (which is America's largest youth development organization) issued a recent survey with The Harris Poll to explore teen's perceptions and experiences around mental health, with shocking results. While there was a lot of relevant information in the full report, here are some of the key findings:



Increased Loneliness

- 61% of teens said that COVID-19 pandemic has increased their feeling of loneliness.
- Teens today report spending 75% of their waking hours on screens during COVID-19.



Increased Mental Health Symptoms

- In this stressful climate, 7 in 10 teens have experienced struggles with mental health.
- 55% of teens say they've experienced anxiety, 45% excessive stress, and 43% depression.



A Need for Discussion

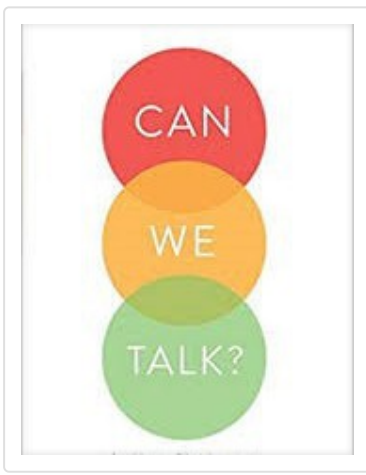
- 79% of teens surveyed wish there was an inclusive environment or safe space for people in school to talk about mental health.

How to Support your Student at Home



Create a safe, positive home environment:

- Be aware of your child's media use, both the content and the amount of time spent on screens. This includes TV, news, movies, Internet, and gaming devices. Be aware of who they might be interacting with on social media and online games.
- Be careful about discussing serious family issues—such as finances, marital problems, or illness—around your children. Children can worry about these things.
- Provide intentional and scheduled time for physical activity, play, and family activities.
- Be a role model by taking care of your own mental health: Talk about your feelings. Make time for things you enjoy.



Check-in with your child about their Mental and Emotional Health

According to one study, “Simply talking about our problems and sharing our negative emotions with someone we trust can be profoundly healing—reducing stress, strengthening our immune system, and reducing physical and emotional distress.” Communication helps with coping and healing. Here are some sample questions that can get this important conversation started:

- Is anything worrying you?
- Do you know what’s bothering you?
- How is your body feeling? Are you having stomach or headaches?
- Who are your friends now? How are you feeling about these friendships?
- Do you have trouble falling asleep?
- Do you feel sad? How often?
- Do you sometimes wish you weren’t alive at all?

Don’t be afraid to ask hard questions. Asking about thoughts of death, for example, shows it’s okay for your child to share with you; never asking shows them that it’s not. [Also,] ask yourself how your behavior is changing because of your child’s difficulties. Remember self-care is important for both student and parent.

If you’re concerned about your child being in danger of self-harm, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK. It’s free, open 24/7 and confidential. You will also find more resources below.

Suicide Warning Signs:

Statements, actions, feelings, and appearances suggesting that your child is suicidal are referred to as suicide warning signs. These signs include the following:

- **Direct verbal threats (“I am going to kill myself.”)**
- **Indirect verbal threats (“I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up,” or “You won’t have me to worry about any more.”)**
- **Sudden or dramatic change in mood (i.e., the youth who was very sad and who becomes very happy)**
- **Anxiety and agitation, reckless behavior, rage and uncontrolled anger, desire for revenge**
- **Increased alcohol or drug use**

- Giving away of prized possessions
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and activities
- Refusal of help or belief that there is no help for them
- Expression of death or suicide themes in writings, in art, or via social media
- Disturbed sleep, decline in appearance and hygiene
- Decline in academic performance

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Participating in Coping Skills Together

Coping with a major change, stressor or crisis can be taxing for adults; for many kids, such things can be overwhelming. Because children don't have the coping skills that the typical adult has taken a lifetime to develop, helping kids develop coping skills for dealing with crises and major stressors is a vital responsibility that can benefit children and the adults who love them. Rather than merely telling them everything will be okay, it helps to really talk to them and demonstrate how to cope with stress so that they'll know what to do when they feel stress as adults—and when their children feel it. This sets up the next several generations to be more capable of coping. Here are some examples of coping skills to try:

- **Learn Breathing Exercises:** “4x4 Breathing.” Tell kids to breathe in to the count of 4, hold to the count of 4, breath out to the count of four, hold to the count of 4. Then repeat 4 times.
- **Participate in Exercise:** Exercise can be a great way for kids to get out of their excess energy when they're nervous and to boost their mood when they're down.
- **Create Artwork:** Whether your child enjoys painting with watercolors, coloring in a coloring book, doodling, sculpting with clay, or creating a collage, creating art can be an excellent coping strategy.
- **Read a Book:** Often, when kids are done reading, they feel better equipped to tackle a problem because they're feeling calm and rejuvenated.
- **Play a Game:** Whether you play a board game or kick around a ball outside, doing something active can help change the channel in their brains. Then, they'll be able to

think about other things, rather than dwell on all the things that make them feel bad.

- **Do Yoga:** Yoga provides many benefits to the mind and the body. A study published in *Body Image* found that four weeks of yoga led to better moods and improved body image in children.
- **Play Calming Music:** Not only has music been shown to speed healing, calm anxiety, and reduce depression, it also is a great way to encourage creativity.
- **Learn Positive Self-Talk:** Teach your kids how to speak to themselves kindly by asking, "What would you say to a friend who had this problem?" They're likely to have some kind, supportive words. Here are some examples: "It is okay to feel (insert emotion), soon this emotion will pass", "I am loved, worthy and cared for". Encourage your kids to use those same kind words when thinking about them self.

Resources: Get Connected!

If you are concerned about your child's mental and emotional well being get them connected to a mental health professional. Below you find some resources:

Care Solace

This is a quick, easy and effective way to get connected with mental health services.

Mobile Crisis Response Team

If your child is experiencing intrusive suicidal thoughts, utilize the mobile crisis response team. Parent Line:
(951) 715-5040

Parent Resource Center

Click here for upcoming parent workshops including: "How to talk to children about Mental Health".

[Click Here for HUSD's Linked Resources](#)
