

Ms. Masla's Suggestions for Building Resiliency in Families during the COVID-19 pandemic and temporary school closure

Antidotes to Fear, Anxiety, and Panic:

When fear becomes activated in the brain and body, we often begin organizing and thinking from a lifetime's worth of fear. We are living in a time where collective fear is very palpable. We intend to remain vigilant and healthy as a school community. A part of our community's wellness is being mindful of fear, particularly in relation to our children.

In the case of the COVID - 19 virus, globally, humans are building and picking up on a shared fear. What are we communicating, with or without words, to our children? Children can pick up on feelings of stress around them when something is wrong. How can we communicate intentionally with our children about the Corona Virus and the fear surrounding it?

Fear is a deep and strong experience and emotion. Emotions are energy. Energy can be actively transformed. The root of the word *emotion* comes from Middle French, and is translated as "energy in motion". To promote wellness and health, emotions, such as fear, grief or anger, require movement, release and expression. ***What is it for you that allows emotions, such as fear or stress, to be moved and released? What is it for your child?***

Is it physical activity? A creative activity? Talking? Being outside? Sleep?

- We encourage you to prioritize those activities that promote emotional release and restoration during this time as much as possible.

- Prioritize nourishment and rest. The parasympathetic nervous system is a nourishing and vital health resource in times of crisis and collective fear.
- Keep a routine and daily rhythm as much as possible. When a child's daily rhythm changes, you may notice that your child's behavior is dysregulated or that they are having more emotional outbursts. This is a common response to a change of rhythm. An antidote can be as much regular structure and daily rhythm as possible at home, or special one on one time with them if your schedule allows so that they can feel connected to you.
- Provide as much space as you are comfortable with to acknowledge, name and express feelings. If your child is more comfortable talking with or expressing emotions with another caregiver or trusted adult, or in a non-verbal way, encourage that.
- Reduce and limit your intake of fear based media, particularly around children. This is one of the recommendations of the [World Health Organization](#). To the extent that you do expose yourself to it, keep your boundaries up and your fear filters on. For instance, before watching the news, you can experiment with practices such as “the zip up” to strengthen your emotional boundaries. To learn how to do “the zip up”, [go to minute 7:15 of this video](#) by Donna Eden.
- Focus on the facts as described by relatively objective sources such as the [CDC](#) and [WHO](#). *More below on how to communicate about the facts with children.*
- Spend time as a family and spend time one on one with your children as much as possible. Connection, resonance, and room for feelings to arise, be seen, felt and heard encourage good health, reduce stress, and calm fear.

What can I be doing to support myself as a caregiver during stressful times?

This [video](#) is of Tony Robbins working with 2,000 people in Hawaii the day after 9-11. During the workshop, Tony pointed out something that most of us know. *It's not the outside event that determines our response.* Our response to any external event, including the covid-19 virus, is in large measure based on our beliefs and our patterns of thought and feeling.

It is important for adults and caregivers to have support to process their own fear and anxiety, separate from their children. That way caregivers can be with children with as clear an emotional state as possible, and see their children with clear eyes.

Keep your stress levels as low as possible (stress lowers the immune system). See below for some simple tools that can help.

- There are energy practice approaches that can help support your immune system. Here's a link released by Eden Energy Medicine to [boost your immune system](#).
- Fear and related emotions are energies stored in the body. You can process these energies in healthy ways such as exercise or mindfulness practices.
- Another tool is an agreement with a spouse or friend, known as a "Listening Partnership". Each person in the Listening Partnership gets a set amount of time; 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, whatever you decide is feasible, during which one person shares, while the other person actively listens. Then, the pair switches roles.
- You can use the [Trauma Tapping Technique](#) and/or [Butterfly Hug](#) to calm down when feeling stressed. You can find other techniques on this [Resources for Resilience](#) pages.

- It supports children's resiliency to learn how to transform fear or worry with and alongside you, their caregiver. A useful practice for transforming stress, anxiety, and fear is the Tonglen Meditation practice, used for transforming energy through breathing. This can be done alone or with family members. Here are [TONGLEN INSTRUCTIONS by Pema Chödrön](#)

Communicating with children about CoronaVirus and Collective Fear :

- While children may be hearing about Covid-19 from other sources, often what they are hearing is inaccurate and frightening. You can set the record straight—if you know the facts yourself. After you have had a chance to offload your stress away from your children, speak with them simply and in concrete terms.
- *Connection:* By prioritizing connection with children, they are better able to relax with you into whatever feelings arise - such as worry, fear or grief, and express them in as healthy a way as possible with your support. Prioritizing even 5-10 intentional minutes a day with your child in which you are putting everything and anything else aside in order to just spend time with them, doing whatever it is that they want to do, can have alarmingly positive effects. Your child will feel bonded and safe, and if you have difficult news to share with them, the chances that they will get dysregulated by it are less likely. If they do become dysregulated, if you can stay with them and their emotions as much as you are able and as much as they allow you to, their capacity to come back and self-regulate, because of that secure attachment with you, will be strong.
- Follow your children's lead. Some children may want to spend time talking, others won't seem interested, and that's alright.

- Offer comfort, reassurance, and honesty. Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have the cold or a flu, and let them know that children don't seem to get as sick from this virus.
- Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in. If children ask about something you don't know the answer to, it's alright to say so and get back to them later, or find out together.
- Talk about all of the positive things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy.
- It's great for children to see you washing your hands, drinking plenty of water, and resting too. This is another form of communication.

Other Resources about Talking to Children in Challenging Times

- Classic advice from Mr. Rogers:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/mr-rogers-neighborhood-talking-to-kids/562352/>
- Hand in hand Parenting Website is a good resource for questions regarding challenges or difficult conversations with children
<https://www.handinhandparenting.org/who-we-are/mission-vision-core-beliefs/>

<https://www.handinhandparenting.org/who-we-are/programs-services/>
- *Listen*, by Patty Wipfler and Tosha Schore, M.A. is a book of *Hand in Hand Parenting* stories, tools and resources.
- You can use a “talk opportunity” to introduce the subject of Corona Virus to your child. After you and your child overhear or see something, you can say something like, “Have you been hearing about the Corona Virus? Well, what do you think it is? What do you think about it?” This way, you can figure out what they already understand and work from there.