

Supporting children and teens during COVID-19

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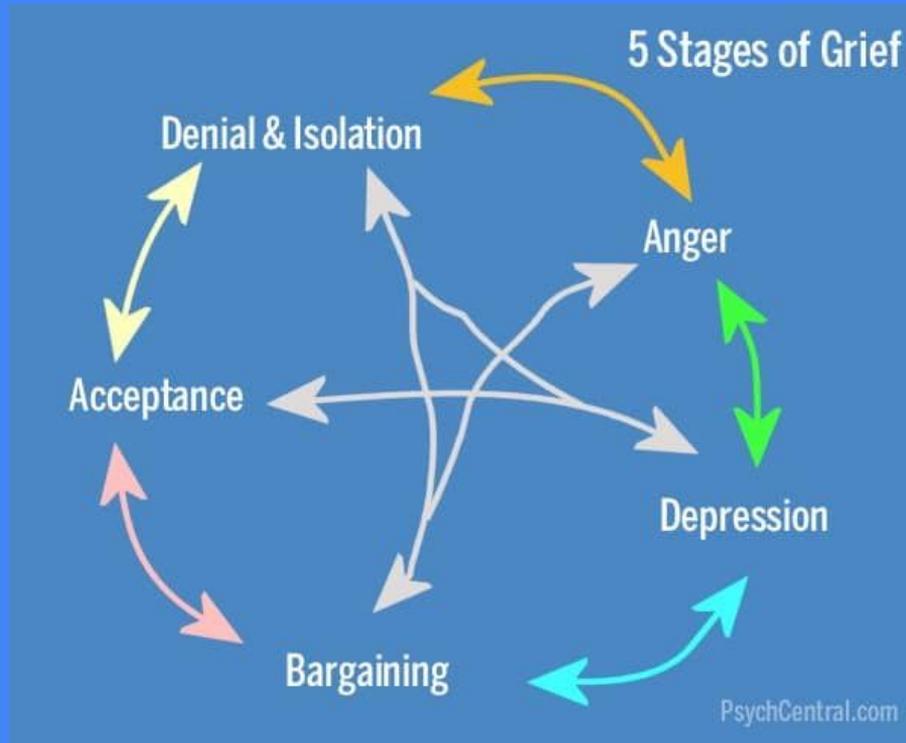
St. Michael's Episcopal School
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Put on your
oxygen mask
first, before
assisting your
child

Grief Process



Children need to know...

1. Am I safe?

2. Am I loved?

3. What can I learn from this?

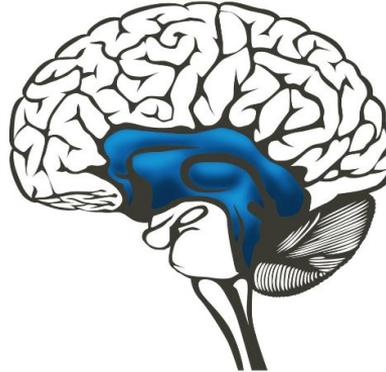
Safety, Connection and Problem-Solving



Survival State

BRAIN STEM

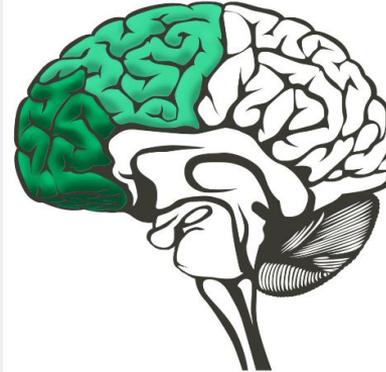
The Survival State represents the primal brain and asks the question, "Am I safe?" The only way to soothe the Survival State is through the creation of *Safety*.



Emotional State

LIMBIC SYSTEM

This Brain State represents mid-level functionality and asks the question, "Am I loved?" The only way to soothe an upset emotional state is through *Connection*.



Executive State

PREFRONTAL LOBES

The Executive State represents the optimal state for problem-solving and learning. This Brain State asks the question, "What can I learn from this?"

Creating Sense of Safety

1. Routines and predictability (healthy sleep habits very important)
2. Dedicated place to do schoolwork
3. Keep focus on present and near future - reduce focus on “What Ifs”
4. Balance conversation regarding adult worries/concerns (economy, job losses, etc.)
5. Limit exposure to news reports; encourage/model getting information from reputable sources (i.e., not social media)
6. Honest, age appropriate conversations re: COVID-19
7. Be approachable and answer questions asked
8. Monitor screen time and conversations/exposures child has on screens

Creating Connection

1. Recognize and discuss feelings
2. Conduct feelings check-in each morning
 - a. Use one word to describe how you are feeling right now
 - b. Pick a emoji to start the day
 - c. Scale of 1- 10, how are you feeling?
 - d. Feeling weather forecast (sunny = happy, rainy = sad, thunderstorms = angry and so on)
 - e. Song that expresses how you feel
3. Collaborative activities at night
 - a. Read book together (either at same time or keep pace and discuss)
 - b. Review highs and lows from the day at dinner
 - c. Give specific praise (something that can be duplicated)
 - d. Mindfulness, breathing and relaxation techniques, meditation, prayer together
 - e. Create box of activities to do together and pull one out and follow through

Maintaining Social Connection With Friends/Extended Family/Teammates

1. Remember and recognize the importance of peer relationships and acceptance for middle schoolers
2. Video chatting and phone conversations are preferable to texting/snapchatting/gaming conversations
3. Encourage participation in St. M virtual hangouts with friends
4. What we are missing most in quarantine is casual interactions with friends -- lunchroom, recess, hallway chat
5. Suggest creative ways to connect with friends (virtual baking, virtual basketball "HORSE" game, virtual spa/salon...)

Ready to Problem-Solve and Learn

1. Plan for the day - reasonable expectations so they can be successful
2. Prepare for transitions
 - a. First, then statements (especially helpful for negotiating screen time)
 - b. Give warnings and reminders - remember to allow wait time when redirecting
 - c. Timers/countdown clocks
3. Brain Breaks
4. Model and support review of progress with labeled, specific praise
5. 5:1 Positive to negative comments
6. Appropriate expectations for online learning and this unusual time

Screen Time

1. Make an age appropriate media plan - not same for all children in the home
2. [Family Media Plan](#) recommended by American Academy of Pediatrics
3. “Moderate users of electronic screens were best off” in terms of mental and physical health [What do we really know about kids and screens?](#)
4. [Pediatricians on Balancing Screen Time, Sleep, and Family During Coronavirus](#)
5. Help child/teen set boundaries and monitor communication if causing stress

What story do you want to tell?

When you and your child recall this time of quarantine in 5 to 10 years, what story do you want to tell? What will they remember?

- Family Spirit Week
- Family Dinners/Invite a virtual guest to dinner
- Creative Projects
- Virtual Hangout time and Celebrations
- Acts of kindness
- Gratitude

Concerns

Signs and Symptoms of Depression and/or Anxiety in Children/Teens

Sadness

Low Energy

Irritability (in excess of typical level of angst and irritability)

Edginess, tension, restlessness

Easily triggered to overreact emotionally

Crying spells

Changes in sleeping patterns (increase or decrease, nightmares)

Changes in eating patterns (increase or decrease)

Self-deprecating comments

Social Withdrawal

Concentration difficulties

Change in bathroom habits

Complains of stomachaches/headaches frequently

Excessively clingy

Suicidal comments/self harming behavior



SCAFFOLDING

You provide the SAFETY, SUPPORT, and STRUCTURE and they build their lives.

You've got this!

You've been preparing your whole parenting life for each expression of independence.



Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

Viktor E. Frankl

Resources

- EAP counseling services through your employer
- Many insurance providers are covering out of pocket costs for access to telemental health services during this quarantine period
- Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255
- Signs and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety in Children [Anxiety and Depression in Children](#)
- For older kids and families: Gratitude Journal <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/gratitude>
- For adults and teens: The Science of Well Being (Free Online Yale University course) <https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>
- For all ages: Breathing/calming/meditation apps ([Headspace: Meditation and Sleep Made Simple](#), [Calm - The #1 App for Meditation and Sleep](#), [GoNoodle: Home](#)- also for Brain Breaks for children)

Resources

- For parents: [Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting From COVID-19](#)
- For parents: [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)
- For children: [Coronavirus: A Book for Children](#)
- For children: [COVID-19 Time Capsule Journal for Kids](#)

Thank you for joining the discussion today!
Best Wishes for your family!

Feel free to reach out and follow up with any questions/concerns:

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