

## How to Support Student and Staff Mental and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Distance Learning

We are living in times where social distancing has become necessary; and students, families and school staff are called upon to avoid in-person interactions for the foreseeable future. For this reason, it is essential to maintain ongoing trusting relationships and to support mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

Here are some suggestions to help educators and staff center supplemental education around students' mental and emotional health and learning needs:

### **Safety Comes First**

Safety is essential to physical and emotional health. Make use of short, personal check-ins as often as possible, and routinely ask students about how they are doing or feeling. If a student or staff member reports circumstances in which they do not feel safe, immediately contact the appropriate administrative person in your building and/or a mental health professional in your district or community and share your concerns.

### **Build and Maintain Trusting Relationships**

If technology allows, utilize face-to-face platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet for regular check-ins with students to continue to build and maintain relationships. When digital technology is not available, telephones allow for important voice contact as an alternative. When possible, establish a regular and predictable communication routine with students. Establish a routine and use posted videos to help create flexibility with online learning for students and families.

### **Less is More**

Remember that, like you, students are likely experiencing a range of emotions as they learn to cope with these unpredictable circumstances. This means that they may seem overwhelmed more easily than usual. Introduce resources and new learning platforms slowly and incrementally, being mindful of each child's capacity to tolerate and adapt to new information and procedures. Routines are important even in remote learning spaces. Get students acquainted with any new learning platform or routine early and remember that "less is more". Begin with short check-ins, understanding that this type of connection with their peers and teachers will be new for many students. Consider that students will join from diverse settings that may not be private or feel safe to fully engage.

# Mental Health and Social Supports



## **Kids Need to Move and Engage**

Both students' minds and bodies need to be engaged for them to thrive and learn. Many students will be inside and using devices for distraction more often than usual during this time. As much as possible, include short periods of movement and/or live social engagement during online learning to keep them active and engaged.

## **Online Citizenship**

Predictable routines and procedures are key to establishing safety and trust during online instruction. Establish agreements regarding acceptable online behavior, and communicate these expectations to students. Decide how to utilize online chat features, cameras and "break-out rooms," etc. Direct students toward appropriate and safe online resources, and teach them how to evaluate resources for safety and relevance.

## **Connect with Colleagues**

Remember, you are not alone. Other teachers and staff are struggling with and sorting through similar issues. Your professional community is vital! Stay in regular communication with your colleagues and set regular times to connect, problem-solve, support each other and celebrate your accomplishments.

## **Try to Stay Positive**

This is a new situation for everyone, and we are all in this together. Do your best to accept that lessons and learning will be different, and be kind to yourself and allow for your own learning curve.

## **Utilize a Wide Variety of Resources**

Equity and access are guiding principles that drive quality education. All students have access to **some** resources, no matter how varied or seemingly limited. Rather than feeling limited by what students may not have, tap into the wide variety of resources that students do have in creative ways.

## **Care for Yourself and Ask for Help**

During this time, you are likely to experience added stress as you work toward learning a new way of teaching and interacting with students, families and colleagues. Do your best to build in short breaks between tasks, and connect with others when feeling overwhelmed. Our colleagues and communities provide vital sources of support and connection as we all learn to navigate this new reality.