

2020

# Supporting Student Stress, Worry & Mental Health During COVID-19

WEBINAR Q&A

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EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SOLUTIONS

## POWERPOINT AND VIDEO QUESTIONS

- Can we share this recording/slide show?
- Can I share the PowerPoint with Parents?
- Will we be able to send this out to other people/ have access to it after?
- Will you be able to send a video of this webinar along with the PowerPoint? I'd like to reshare with my Mental Health staff to support their work with students and the team as well.
- Can this be shared with other counselors at my school? if yes how can I share it?
- Can I share this PowerPoint with others in my district to share with parents?
- Are the slides copyrighted or may I share these slides with the school I teach at?
- Would it be OK to share certain slides on our Social Emotional page we made for our district's students specific for this school closure?

**ANSWER:** Yes, we encourage you to send out the link to the PowerPoint and video to others that may find it helpful. Most of the information provided was pulled from the sources mentioned at the beginning of the webinar, so when sharing it is important to credit those organizations.

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## SCREEN TIME QUESTIONS

- **Can you define “screen time”- gaming, texting, etc.?**
  - Screen time is the amount of time spent using a device with a screen such as a smartphone, computer, television, or video game console. For the purposes of our discussions, we are not including children needing to use devices for school purposes or parents using devices for work purposes.
- **Silly question but managing screen time when we are working from home and most calls/e-mails/meetings are attached to the computer. As a counselor, I try to meet face to face as much as possible, but right now those meetings are via Zoom**
- **Regarding the 2-hour limit screen time, particularly the mid and hs age.... Do you consider YouTube videos where the child is learning a particular skill, or tedtalks, etc. to be part of screen time? Is it the purposeless viewing vs purposeful viewing?**
- **You said we would limit screen time to 2 hours regardless of age? How do you solve that when the kids are on their school devices through home bound learning for most of the day?**
  - Not, a silly question. I appreciate this question so much. Screen time was defined 2 weeks ago as “the amount of time spent using a device with a screen such as a smartphone, computer, television, or video game console”. This week, I would take it a step further and say we are speaking about screen time that is not work related or school related.
  - Any time that a student is using electronics as a learning tool it is purposeful viewing.
- **Do Disney movies fall in the purposeless category?**
  - To give some context, we talked about purposeful use of technology and purposeless. Disney movies can be a great way to make us feel good, to help us move around, to sing to, to provide comfort in feeling connected to them. With any activity, it is the purpose you make of it.
- **With the limitation/orders to not interact with peers, isn't screen time (facetime/gaming/chart rooms) the only method of interactions?**
  - You are absolutely correct. As I mentioned before, we need to redefine what it means. Let me offer this example, if you tell a middle schooler to call their grandmother. The call lasts about 5 minutes and then quickly digress to YouTube, Pinterest, or a game. I recommend just be mindful of how much time they are on electronics. Our kids need to be moving more and electronics cause sedentary behavior.

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## **NEWS MEDIA QUESTIONS**

- **Is there any good way to know when news is helpful and when it is hurtful? How can I know when I am incorrectly rationalizing watching the white house briefings and reading news articles and when it is helpful to get facts and not avoid it?**
  - Credible sources like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) provide facts without editorials. I recommend that you look to credible sources that are not editorializing the information. Use trusted friends and colleagues to discuss issues that you might have more concern about.

## **PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT/COUSELING SUPPORT VIRTUALLY QUESTIONS**

- **What are your suggestions for school based mental health clinicians (school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers) and whether or not they should be providing counseling to students remotely – by zoom or phone?**
- **How do I support students virtually? Are there some practical things that would be most helpful?**
- **What role should school counselors have during virtual learning days? How should we be available to students? Email, google hangout, etc.?**
- **What are some things I can do as a high school counselor to help my students since all the communication is online?**
- **As a counselor- what is your opinion on creating a group space on the online platform to have students talk about their routine?**
- **How much should we individually check in with our most vulnerable students? As a school counselor, of course I want to check in with them and see how they are doing (middle school aged). However, my concern is that the more I check in with them, the more I am opening myself up to difficult situations that I cannot do much to help at the moment (suicidal ideation, family conflict, etc.) and actually making things more difficult for them.**
- **What are your thoughts for school social workers to provide tele counseling to their students?**
- **How do you suggest we communicated with our most vulnerable students? I am a school counselor and want to do a meaningful check in with some key students, but I am afraid it will open up a Pandora's box of issues that I can't help with while socially distancing from students for who knows how long?**

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- **I am an elementary school principal. What specific suggestions do you have about how to routinize/ systematize mental health check ins or socio-emotional supports virtually during school closure?**
- **Do you have any suggestions on the role school counselors should have in supporting students during Distance Learning with considerations to the ethical issues that virtual counseling can come with?**
- **It appears that the great majority of districts that we are currently working with are just doing their best. Best includes placing children first and especially those who are the most vulnerable. Doing your best means providing students with counseling support either by phone or a virtual platform.**
- **Do you have any suggestions on the role school counselors should have in supporting students during Distance Learning with considerations to the ethical issues that virtual counseling can come with?**
- **Do you have suggestions regarding how school counselors can support and stay connected with our entire school communities in online and remote settings (especially when we're newly transitioning to these settings)?**

**ANSWER:** I grouped these questions together in order to give a succinct answer. I understand that there are many circumstances that concerns us. We are in a time of a different type of relationship building, it is important to continue to ask our children, our students, our friends, "how are you?" We need more relationship these days. Offering telehealth practices is one way to connect. Making appointments with students and keeping those appointments, allows students to feel that the adults are reliable and available.

First and foremost, look at your district's guidelines and your states guidelines as well. Those are going to guide you. You may be able to provide remote counseling via phone, ZOOM, Google Hangouts. These are just some examples. You need to understand your districts policy and state regulations as to which one you can you.

This article may provide some assistance in getting you started to frame the work you are trying to do virtually. Things are changing quickly, so you want to keep up-to-date with your district and state guidelines. <https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/a-guide-to-providing-telehealth-during-the-covid-19-crisis>

The following practices will help you close the door on risk rather than opening up Pandora's box.

- The following are some best practices that Effective School Solutions is using:

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- ✓ Student and Parent are in agreement with regular check-ins. ESS suggest 3 times a week or more. The younger ages may require more check-ins
  - ✓ Parent and Students are provided the risk and benefits related to virtual counseling, e.g. there are some limitations
  - ✓ Parent and Student must ensure confidentiality
  - ✓ Parents MUST be available regularly for consultation
- The following are some practices that Effective School Solutions suggests for schools:
- ✓ Create a written description of remote counseling that includes regular check ins with students and their parents including expectations of the school, student and family
  - ✓ Think about triaging your students based on their acuity.
  - ✓ Have regular meetings with school staff to discuss students of concern
  - ✓ Document your sessions with students according to district policy
  - ✓ You are opening yourself up to more by not checking in.
  - ✓ If you are concerned about a student, contact your administrator and refer the student outside services
  - ✓ Create a list of local outside services for your district
  - ✓ Ethical issues must always be considered related to the limitation of remote counseling that includes confidentiality concerns. Consider creation of a virtual counseling consent for treatment that includes the risks of care that parents can sign or verbally consent to.
  - ✓ Groups come with their own set of potential risks, but they can be a very powerful tool during a time when social isolation is so acute. Of course, using a virtual platform is the ideal way to provide this service. Creating a set of group rules in advance that focuses on appropriate behavior is suggested. A platform where you can mute participants video or audio feed is ideal to protect everyone from inappropriate behavior. Think about focusing on skills building or helping them practice their skills.

Overall, having check ins with vulnerable students far outweighs the risks of not providing care.

- **What is a reasonable expectation for teachers/counselors in identifying and supporting the anxiety/mental health of the student when at home?**
  - In the PowerPoint, you will see a list of reactions. I believe it is our responsibility to become familiar with the signs. Also, know your resources. These are places you can go to and ask questions. Also, know what your district is planning if you are concerned about a student.

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- **What do you suggest teachers do to keep students with severe social anxiety from completely shutting down during this time?**
  - We need to remind students that they are not alone. They can only control what is in their control. I believe students who are anxious are going to teach us. They have learned skills to manage, now it is time to share those skills. We need to remind our students that they can only control what they can control for.
- **Do you have any elementary age videos that you can recommend for addressing anxiety and worry? For students to watch**
  - My expertise is with middle schooler and high schoolers, so I reached out to colleagues that gave me these resources.  
[https://youtu.be/bRkLIoT\\_NA](https://youtu.be/bRkLIoT_NA)                      <https://youtu.be/EJNOsvTnR1k>  
<https://youtu.be/3TZXvhYyIMo>                      <https://youtu.be/1WSH9DgjpZU>  
<https://youtu.be/wf5K3pP2IUQ>
- **How to manage student concern about standardized testing or graduating on time? (atypical h.s where students are 2-time seniors and possibly failed standardized testing a time too before)**
  - I may sound redundant in this section of answers. We can validate feelings and remind them that they can only control what they can control. Any issue like this is going to be a challenge for school districts. Continue to advocate for your students as well.
- **I work with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students. They miss classroom instruction. I am a paraprofessional and I work closely with 8 students. How can I help them better?**
- **As a paraprofessional, how can I support my teacher and students?**
- **How can I as a 1:1 para help my student during the remote learning?**

**ANSWER:** As with all of this, you need to look at your district policies. Reaching out to the teacher to see where you can help. Students who work with Paraprofessionals/Instructional Aides/Assistant Teachers would most likely benefit from some one-to-one time to support the students. This is an opportunity for a Para to reach out to students that are less engaged. I am sure that collaboration with teacher and Paras will provide opportunities for plans where the student is connected to more than one adult.

- **I am a teacher and I worry about students who feel school is their safe place. How can I support them from a distance?**
  - I worry about these students as well. We do our best to remain consistent, predictable, and reliable. We have an opportunity to teach those people it is not the building that brings them safety, but the people in the building.

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## Effective School Solutions

- **What should we suggest to parents who work and have the children doing e-school at 8pm and beyond?**
  - If parents need assistance with the e-school they should reach out to teachers to make a plan.
- **What would be the best way to support a child who's home life is very hectic ? The one place they don't want to be they have to be in this moment**
  - Use the above practices mentioned. Help the student to connect to resources outside the home. The PowerPoint includes resources that are chat functions for students.
- **Right now, my students seem to be handling the transition pretty well, but the parents are very stressed out and very anxious. Any help for overly anxious parents who are now having to work from home while also helping their kids learn remotely?**
  - I would share the PowerPoint with them. As I said, in the presentation, all the tips are very much for us as adults. We have to remember to be patient, reassuring, and consistent. We cannot do those things for our children if we cannot do them for ourselves.

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## **FAMILY MEMBERS AND COVID-19 QUESTIONS**

- **Can you offer insights to handling the situation of a family member contracting COVID 19?**
  - I can only speak to what is in my wheelhouse. The medical professionals can give specifics as to what family members are to do to keep themselves from contracting COVID-19. It is important to relay to children that you are taking every precaution prevent COVID-19. In the Tips section of the PowerPoint this will give you some ideas as to what to focus on.
- **How to support students who are worried about their grandparents, older loved ones?**
  - Follow the Tips section provided in the Power Point. Be open, honest, reassuring and connected. Take all the precautions necessary. This is a time, where we are seeing neighbor helping neighbor, not building fences.
- **How do you balance exposure to developmentally appropriate conversations within a household containing a teenager, a school age child, and a preschool age child?**
  - This is a wonderful opportunity to set limits and guidelines for conversations. Let your kids be the guide. If someone needs to have a conversation that other ears cannot hear, whether little or not, go for a walk. Some conversations take place after the little one is in bed.
- **How do you suggest talking to your 20-something year old child?**
  - I would follow the guidelines for the adolescents and feel that they can manage a conversation with more detail and information.
- **Would love tips on making sure each child gets enough attention and support. I have four kids, the youngest two with developmental and/or health issues.**
  - Schedule, schedule, schedule. Make sure that there is special time and that child helps define what that time looks like. Make them part of the planning so they feel like there is some control.
- **What recommendations do you have for parents whose kids are resistant to the supportive measures mentioned?**
- **Can you talk about tips on talking to teenagers taking this seriously? My girl is great about it, my boy thinks he should be able to have groups of friends over, sleep at other people's houses, go to Wawa every 2 hours, etc...**
- **My teen son is not taking any precautions and wants to have sleepovers and more. How do I get him to take this seriously?**

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**ANSWER:** Have another trusted adult to tell them the importance of physical distance. Sometimes, what we say as parents does not have the impact when a teacher, an administrator, an aunt or uncle says it.

- **I have a child who has a lot of anxiety about school and getting his work done. With this temporary normal we have made a schedule for him. We are having a hard time getting him to take a break for “lunch and recess”. He wants to get his work done. Do you have any tips to help with this? He was upset the entire recess/walk time we had the last two days.**
  - It is important that our kids feel like they have control. These new schedules may need to be renegotiated so they work for everyone. We may not get it right the first time.
- **My children are 6 and almost 4. They know there are lots of germs and we have to wash our hands extra. Should I tell them more or let it be? They don't seem to know anything else. I am a teacher and working with them at home, but I'm unsure how much they should know.**
  - Brief, simple and direct information is best. More information might be hard for them to process. Think about what value you want to teach and use that as a starting place.
- **What about the kids who blames his/herself, due to this issue?**
  - Reassuring our kids that it is no one fault is helpful. Validating feelings as much as possible. We cannot argue that they may feel that way but we can provide facts to state that we don't know everything about COVID-19 and that is why we have a plan for safety.
- **Also, what about those with joint custody. Is it o.k. to have kids go back and forth from the houses? Are there special precautions we should be taking?**
  - It is important to have a plan for safety, that may be involving going between houses. Each circumstance is different and requires a conversation about how to keep everyone engaged in a safety plan.
- **One of the biggest issues I've been encountering is that while all the news and releases say to distance yourselves, some workers (i.e. delivery drivers, healthcare personnel, grocery clerks, etc) are inevitably going to be out at risk everyday. This can be extremely stressful for the family members at home, including the children that are being told to stay home to be safe.**
  - It is important to have a plan for safety. Each circumstance is different and requires a conversation about how to keep everyone engaged in a safety plan while ensuring that the adults working will do their best to stick to the plan.

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- **My teens don't ask questions and don't seem concerned at all. They are somewhat unemotional regularly, but how can I reach them?**
  - One of the adolescent developmental milestones is to seem like they are not impacted by the world around them. Keep the lines of communication open. Make sure that they know you are available and ready to talk when they are. Ensure they are following safety plans. Sometimes, you starting to talk about what you learned, what you heard, what you are going to starts to move the conversation.
- **How to not re-enforce social isolation and depression in a child who already suffers?**
  - Use the Tips provided in the PowerPoint to help set up a schedule. We can deal with anything that is temporary and this is temporary.

## 2020 SENIORS DURING COVID-19 QUESTIONS

- **How is it best to support our seniors as they are missing out on their senior activities? Graduations, proms, senior events all being cancelled.**
- **How do you suggest handling the loss of graduation services, dances, etc. for our kids?**

### ANSWER

- Validate their feelings. This is the question that I needed help answering. This is the question I am not sure we have all the answers yet. I recently read a piece by the Superintendent of Janesville. Here is a portion of his letter. Sometimes, borrowing the words from another, helps us to start the conversation.

*"You are no strangers to adversity. Nineteen years ago, you entered the world at another tumultuous time – when the world, post 9-11, was forced to adjust and change our way of life as a result of the worst terrorist attack our country had ever experienced. You were our first students who've always had to go through security checks when going to a Packers game at Lambeau, or have always had to take off your shoes when going through airport security. You came into the world during a time of chaos, and chaos is now ushering you out of high school and pushing you into adulthood. You are used to uncertainty, and you know how to handle unpredictable times.*

*Maya Angelou once said, "You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."*

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*There is wisdom in her words. You see, life is not an endless series of pleasant experiences—we all learn from adversity. We learn about our character, our resolve, and we develop plans to move us forward.*

## **Translation Questions**

- **We have many ELL families in our community, we have translations of all documents that go out as well as translations online. To support them more around Mental Health are there resources of videos, activities that are in native languages such as: Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Cantonese, etc.**
  - I would start with this resource.  
<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/mentalhealth.html>
- **I wonder if these slides are available in other languages. Something to consider if not. Thanks!**

**ANSWER:** Effective School Solutions is looking to translate this presentation into Spanish.

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## SUICIDAL IDEATION CONCERNS QUESTIONS

- **Can you provide more resources to use now that the ER is no longer an option for suicidal individuals?**
  - Check with resources in your state. If you are concerned about someone who struggles with suicidal ideation there should be a safety plan in place. Some states have screening centers that are not in the ER and they are still open. Look at your local resources and create a safety plan.
- **I was surprised that you would ask the student directly “are you considering suicide”. Is this assuming the student has history of this?**
  - We want to practice asking the questions “Are you okay?” and “How can I help?” this for be for everyone. If you are concerned about safety, ask “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” or “Are you thinking about suicide?”. In general, we are not asking the suicidal questions. However, if you are concerned that a student is struggling, you should ask “are you suicidal?”. This tells the student that you are not afraid to have the conversation with him or her. In fact, it says you are not afraid to have any difficult conversation. When we don't ask the question, we may be missing an opportunity to have the conversation.
- **Have you gathered any information about the legality of handling it when/if a student shares suicidal thought with a teacher or school counselor while in/on a virtual conferencing session? My district uses Zoom and I have some concern about supporting my students because of not being able to do a full risk assessment if they disconnect. I guess I would call 911 and report for a wellness check? Just wanted to start the conversation.**
  - Absolutely, you on the right track. Thank you for starting the conversation. You may need to call 911 or the family to ensure that the student is safe. The student may require screening. In addition, when you have a student of concern, you should create a safety plan and have the parent contact information as well. Parents should be aware that you are scheduling appointments with students and when the meeting is taking place. Know your resources and share resources with your students. See the PowerPoint for some resources as well. It is important to know if you do send a student to screening that there is follow up contact and the family and student understand the importance of following the recommendations.

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## OTHER QUESTIONS

- **What is the probability of the students returning to school on or around April 20th? Do we need to prepare for our students not returning for the remainder of the school year?**
  - As a therapist, I often say that I do not have a crystal ball. In this case I wish I did. We can only control what we can control. For me, that is today, and planning for tomorrow. I am not going to speculate any further ahead. We have to challenge ourselves to be in the present.
- **Do you have more information specifically around trauma when friends and family are not ok? There may be significant illness and deaths.**
  - <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/traumatic-grief> is a good resource.
- **Would it be a good idea to see if my captains of the high school swim team I coach to reach out to the other members of the team, so they stay in contact with each other during this temporary normal we are in?**
  - Yes. This is an excellent idea!
- **Hello, will national hotlines be available if there should be a national shut down?**
  - It is my understanding that hotlines remain in place. When the government went into furlough in the past, the hotlines remained open.
- **Please elaborate more about what type of support a parent will receive when they'd call the autism help line?**
  - I would recommend with any help line that you call it to see what they offer. I cannot specifically, speak to this because it was a resource given to me by a colleague.
- **Do you have any videos that demonstrate how to cope at home, engage in self-care, grounding exercises etc. that can be shared with families and/or students?**
  - Please follow us on social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) and our website. You will find resources there.
- **This is all great information for our current situation! I am just wondering if you have any advice or feedback for school personnel in regards to how to prepare for the transition back to school (when that time occurs)? I'm just thinking of students' anxieties and mental health status upon returning to school**
  - We need to stay focused on the present. This will help our students with anxiety. There is so much up in the air about returning to school that it would cause more anxiety in students to begin to focus on that.
- **Are there any specific strategies you would use during this time to deal with students who have been diagnosed with anxiety?**
  - Please follow us on social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) and our website. You will find resources there.

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