

# Solutions Newsletter

October 2021



Effective School  
Solutions

*Solutions* is a newsletter published by ESS for parents, guardians and caretakers. Each issue highlights an important topic related to children's mental health and provides practical applications for parents in the home environment.

## Re-acclimating to School in the Midst of a Pandemic

Last month, as the nation marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, we had the opportunity to honor those who lost their lives on that day as well as those whose lives were forever changed by their losses. Even for individuals not directly impacted, these twenty years have brought lasting changes that we barely register any more: long security lines at airports, bag checks at concerts, having to show ID to enter office and government buildings, etc. For many, a sense of safety has never been fully restored, as we observe a low flying plane, or a cloudless blue sky, or a package left unattended at a bus or train station.

Although we are still dealing with the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have 20 years of data to help us understand the impact of what scientists call "collective" trauma. Psychologist Roxane Cohen Silver, PhD emphasizes that "the range of exposures and the range of impact of the pandemic has really differed ... It hasn't been a one size fits all exposure, and ... There will not be a one size fits all response ... There's enormous variability in how people process and respond to events, very much influenced by people's prior life experiences, by their chronic stress or their experiences during the event, and by the amount of support and resources that they have in the aftermath."

Although each child is unique, parents and caregivers can use a variety of common techniques to help children adapt and heal from the effects of the pandemic. We do not know what the pandemic's long-term effects will be, but parents can help their children re-acclimate to school this fall.

- First and foremost, expect things to be different this fall. Your child may have concentration and learning problems, have difficulty regulating emotions, and have less ability to control behaviors. Your child may be inflexible at times and have outbursts for no apparent reason and may complain of physical and/or emotional symptoms. Be alert for the possible use of alcohol, pot, or other substances.
- Encourage your child to express thoughts, feelings, and concerns, and frequently ask the following questions: What do **you** need? Help **me** to understand? How can **I** help?
- Be even more vigilant about restricting exposure to media and social media. Help your child avoid what journalists call "doom scrolling" (immersing oneself in

stories about tragedies). Studies on the aftermath of 9/11 have demonstrated the traumatizing effects of excessive exposure to disturbing images and news. This is especially critical now as news of illness and death, the impact of racism, political strife, economic loss, and natural disasters fill the airwaves.

- Avoid "toxic positivity" or excessive reassurance that everything will be alright. Acknowledge that things are not fair, that they are experiencing losses, that things are difficult.
- To help reduce the anxiety associated with uncertainty, create, and stick with consistent daily routines, such as morning and bedtime routines, sleep times, eating schedules, homework, and recreation times.
- Help your child organize his/her workspace and school materials.
- Ask teachers and/or use the internet to research methods for problem solving. Be deliberate and consistent in using a list of problem-solving steps to help your child develop this skill.
- Ask teachers or school-based counselors for a list of simple coping skills that your child is learning at school. Set time aside each day for practicing these coping skills, such as taking deep breaths, using movement to let go of anxiety, using encouraging self-talk, etc.
- Recognize and address your own anxieties and struggles so that you can project confidence with your children despite your own concerns.

### Resources:

[Speaking of Psychology: Twenty years after 9/11, what have we learned about collective trauma? with Roxane Cohen Silver, PhD \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/pubs/2021/09/04/1033672045/6-tips-for-coping-with-covid-anxiety-this-fall-and-winter)

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/09/04/1033672045/6-tips-for-coping-with-covid-anxiety-this-fall-and-winter>