

Solutions Newsletter

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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.

Preparing Your Child for a Safe Summer

As we enter a third summer with the burden of COVID-related uncertainty, we are reminded that schools play a critical role in the community, a role that reaches far beyond academic instruction. Students and parents rely on teachers and school communities to provide structure and emotional support, to supply nutritious meals, to offer medical and mental health services, and to offer opportunities for recreation and for socialization. As this school year draws to a close, parents can maximize the safety of their children by collaborating with teachers and mental health professionals to develop a safety plan that will incorporate opportunities for structure and support over the summer months.

Typically, safety plans have been used to help at-risk students navigate the time of year when the structure and mental health resources provided at school are unavailable to them. This summer, however, with many more students struggling both academically and emotionally because of pandemic-related losses and disruptions, it would be helpful for parents to consider creating a summer safety plan for each of their children. If your child is receiving any level of school-based mental health services, work with your child's clinician to develop his/her plan and ask for ideas about how to create plans for your other children as well.

A child's individualized safety plan is designed to facilitate structure, to identify resources, to specify potential stressors that might arise over the summer, and to list coping strategies that can be used. A one-page safety plan can include:

- A sample daily schedule that outlines times for self-care, family meals, online activities, seeing friends, doing chores, exercise, etc.
- A list of safe places where your child can find a sense of calm and security when stressed. This might include his/her room, the home of a trusted neighbor, friend, or relative, or a favorite place in nature such as under a shady tree in a community park.
- The phone numbers of "safe people" to reach out to for emotional support and help as needed.

- A list of fun activities to facilitate focus and relaxation, such as bike riding, playing games with friends, playing a musical instrument, watching a movie, swimming, walking the dog, etc.
- Anticipated stressors over the summer, e.g., being home alone and feeling lonely or scared, an older sibling leaving for college, not being invited to a party, being bullied online or in person, a move to another home, going to camp with a lot of unfamiliar people, etc.
- Problem-solving strategies to address stressors directly, as well as a list of self-soothing skills such as deep breathing, listening to music, writing in a journal, playing with a pet, etc.

Parents should involve their children in the development of a safety plan, as well as the child's therapist, other involved health professionals, and perhaps a teacher or two. Make sure to ask your district and school-based mental health professionals for a list of community resources (including emergency services, recreational activities, tutoring services, etc.) and a contact person/number for school mental health supports available over the summer. If your child is on medication and/or in regular therapy, summer is not the time to take a break from these treatments unless prescribed by the provider (e.g., a psychiatrist or pediatrician might recommend a break from or reduction of ADHD meds over the summer).

Parents might also explore whether any available Extended School Year (ESY) programs are offered by their districts. These programs can help certain students maintain a level of school engagement over the summer that will support both educational and mental health goals.

Besides helping your child stay safe this summer, please pay attention to your own health and well-being.

ESS wishes you a fun and restful summer!