



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.

Paving the Road to Recovery with Self Care

As summer approaches, Americans are awakening from our collective nightmare. COVID-19 infection rates and hospitalizations are dramatically reduced; businesses and schools, restaurants and theaters, and all types of recreational venues have begun to move toward normalized schedules.

So, why aren't we feeling better? Despite the remarkable efficacy of vaccines, the easing of social distancing and mask-wearing requirements, and the ability to return to many of life's simple pleasures, many are still feeling uneasy, and are struggling to "re-enter" their lives. Some are still reeling from unrecoverable losses: lost loved ones, financial ruin, or long-term health consequences from COVID. Many more, after living in a state of fear and uncertainty for 16 months, are feeling stagnant and empty.

The process of recovery from a prolonged state of fight-or-flight will be gradual, and this summer is the ideal time for students and their families to focus on self-care. Parents of school-age children have had some of the highest stress levels since the beginning of the pandemic. The usual recommendations to eat healthy, get plenty of sleep, and exercise regularly are a good place to start. Take a vacation if possible. But here are some other ideas for parents to consider:

- ✓ At least once a week, shake up your routine. Try a new food, learn a new song, take a different route home when on a walk or out for a drive.
- ✓ Make a list of friends and family members with whom you've been out of touch. Contact one or two people each week to re-establish connections.
- ✓ Organize one thing each day – a drawer, a briefcase, a handbag – to re-establish a sense of order and control.
- ✓ Create a daily "do not disturb" break – allow yourself to be unavailable, for example, between 3 and 3:15 each day.
- ✓ Take technology breaks, shutting down all screens for an hour or more each day. Turn off notifications on your phone so that you feel more in control about when to respond to messages. Create "phone-free" zones, e.g., the dining table and the bedroom. Use an alarm clock rather than relying on the phone's alarm. Journal, stretch, take your cup of coffee outside, before reaching for your phone each morning.

- ✓ Create a list of self-soothing activities to draw from if anxiety emerges: make a cup of tea, take a shower, dance to your favorite song, call a friend, spray on some perfume or cologne, put on a cozy or loved article of clothing, work on a puzzle, practice paced breathing, etc.
- ✓ Get outside: Psychologists who study positive psychology find that being out in nature can create a state of awe or wonder, and that this in turn can facilitate both gratitude and calm.
- ✓ Notice self-critical thoughts and beliefs, and actively practice more balanced perspectives. Replace "I'm not doing enough, I'm lazy", etc. with "I'm doing the best that I can, it's normal to feel depleted and unmotivated". Challenge your own black/white, all-or-none thinking. Remind yourself of what you've accomplished despite the pandemic.
- ✓ Pick a regular time each week for your family to give thanks, each sharing 3 things from the week for which you are grateful.
- ✓ Extend an unexpected kindness – hold a door, send someone a handwritten note or small gift, smile and say "hello" to a stranger in line or in an elevator.
- ✓ **ASK FOR HELP.** If sad or anxious feelings or other mental health symptoms persist or worsen, consider starting or resuming mental health counseling, and see your PCP or a psychiatrist to explore medications if appropriate.

Resources:

[Feeling Blah During the Pandemic? It's Called Languishing - The New York Times](#)

[We Have All Hit A Wall – New York Times](#)