

GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS DURING COVID-19 AND OTHER CRISES

YOUR IMPORTANT ROLE AS A HERO FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING AND LONG-TERM ACADEMIC SUCCESS WHEN SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED

Teachers are a lifeline for many students. Your role is even more critical in times of crisis. The purpose of this tool is to provide guidance and support as you continue to be a role-model and champion for students.

Impact of Crisis on Students

With this current global pandemic, we are all feeling a collective stress. Stress can be helpful if it motivates us to take safety measures, and it can be tolerable if we use our healthy coping strategies. However, too much stress can overwhelm our nervous system and weaken our immune system leaving us at increased risk for anxiety, depression, decreased cognitive performance and infections. In addition, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including child abuse and neglect, increase when caregivers experience stress and economic hardships. Since schools have closed, children have lost the safety net provided by caring teachers, counselors, and other personnel.

Your Role Now

You can continue to be a hero to students in this time of crisis and help mitigate the negative impact of traumatic events and stress; caregivers might not be able to do it alone. Prioritizing student safety and managing stress is critical to the well-being and long-term academic success of our students.

What You Can Do

- **Create safety:** Be available, be compassionate. Help students (and parents!) create predictability and a feeling of control. Connect visually or auditorily with students.
- **Provide social and emotional support to students (and families):** Be a student's support system. Help kids connect with each other. You can engage directly with parents as well.
- **Prioritize health and well-being:** Adding more stress will worsen a student's cognitive ability to adapt and learn, so consider the total academic workload you and your fellow teachers are asking of your students. Promote healthy sleeping, eating and exercise habits.
- **Identify children and families who need additional support:** Your ability to connect families or students to resources now can make all the difference. Mandated reporter duties do not stop because children are not in the classroom, but what you see may be different.

Child Well-Being Check



You may be one of the few adults who can check in on your student during this time, and you play an important role in supporting their well-being.

1. Is the child missing scheduled video meetings or office hours? Are you unable to connect with them via phone?
2. Have you heard or seen anything concerning on video, such as screaming, unsanitary housing conditions, or young children alone or being cared for by other young children?
3. Does your student appear tired, sad, nervous, disruptive, angry, etc. in video meetings, email exchanges, or phone calls?

If you answered yes to any of these questions or you are concerned about a student for any reason:

1. If you believe the student or family needs support and you have a school or district wellness or counseling office, follow your protocols for a referral. You may need to help the family make a direct connection.
2. If you don't have a place at your school to refer students or their families, refer them to a community based organization whose job it is to help people connect with resources.
3. If you believe child abuse or neglect is occurring, follow your school's reporting process, or contact your county child abuse reporting hotline.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What can I do to support families I think are struggling?

Families are already under tremendous stress, so if possible avoid adding to their burdens. Just asking parents how they are can make a big difference. Consider reaching out directly to the caregivers and ask how you can help. Offer to create a shared contact list among parents so they can reach out to each other for support. You may want to build your own resource list if you don't have a system in your school to connect families to services. Include numbers for organizations that specialize in resource and referral, such as family resource centers.

For parents who are having trouble being a parent, you can refer them to a 24/7 parent help line by [Childhelp](#) at 800-4-A-CHILD.

Are there additional strategies for supporting children and families through traumatic experiences?

Following **trauma-informed practices** can help bolster a child's neurological development and long-term academic success. For example, brief breathing or mindfulness practices can help students feel calmer and engage more fully with lesson plans. <https://www.mindfulschools.org/> ; <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>; <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package>

In addition, **prioritizing social emotional skill building will help children manage stress**, deal with daily challenges and reach out for support when needed. Social emotional competence of children is also a principal predictor of academic success and adjustment across the lifespan. <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>

What can I do to help myself during this crisis?

To be there for your students, you need to put yourself first. This might be hard to do, especially now. Do what you can to prioritize healthy relationships, sleep, nutrition, exercise, mindfulness, nature, and your own mental health. Self care is not selfish. [One hour video on the Big 7 strategies to self regulate](#); <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

What do I do if a child does not attend virtual class?

Use that as an opportunity to follow up with a phone call to check in. If that is not successful, follow your school's processes for non-attendance, but keep trying to connect via email, text, or call. Enlist help from other adults allowed to contact the student.

What if I see something I'm concerned about?

Trust your instincts, and make a connection with others for help. If you see anything you are concerned about and you are lucky enough to have an existing process in your school and it is still in place, follow that first. If you have a Wellness Center, school counseling program, or on-site community-based organization partner, contact them with your concern and follow their advice. Your role can be protective, as you may be the only person seeing a student. As always, if you see signs of child abuse and neglect, you must report. Within Virginia: 1-800-552-7096 From out-of-state: 804-786-8536, or contact your local Department of Social Services <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/index.cgi>

I think my student is afraid or needs help but is not able to talk to me privately; what can I do?

At the beginning of each video lesson or conversation, tell your students they can communicate with you via private chat message at any time during the call. Assure them no one but you will see the message.

You are not alone. Thank you for being part of the community that keeps our kids safe.
More resources are available at familiesforwardva.org/child-abuse-prevention-resources