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To: BOCES District Superintendents  
Superintendents of Public School Districts  
Principals of Public Schools  
Charter School Leaders  
Principals of Private Schools

From: Kathleen R. DeCataldo

Subject: Resources for Mental Health and Talking to Young People About COVID-19

Feeling anxiety amid a global pandemic is normal and natural for everyone. As the adults, it's critical that we take care of our own mental and physical health, and that will help us to better support our young people. The following resources offer guidance for self-care as well as strategies for talking about COVID-19 honestly and effectively with young people.

**[Feeling Stressed About Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)? Managing Anxiety in an Anxiety-Provoking Situation](#)**  
**New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH)**

The outbreak of COVID-19 around the world has led to the spread of fear and panic for individuals and communities. In addition to following physical precautions guidelines, individuals should be taking care of their psychological well-being.

This guide includes tips for the following populations:

- For Everyone
- For Individuals Receiving Mental Health Services
- For Parents, Including Parents of Children with Pre-Existing Anxiety Disorders
- For Caregivers of Older Adults
- For Mental Health Providers

The guide is also available in the following languages.

- [Bengali](#)
- [Chinese \(Simplified\)](#)
- [Haitian-Creole](#)
- [Korean](#)
- [Russian](#)
- [Spanish](#)

OMH has also created the New York State Emotional Support Line staffed by specially trained volunteers who can help you. Call **1-844-863-9314**.

### **[Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)**

#### **National Association of School Psychologists**

- The publication, **[Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource, from the National Association of School Psychologists](#)**, offers suggestions for remaining calm and assuring, making yourself available to young people, keeping explanations age appropriate, avoiding excessive blaming, monitoring television and social media exposure, maintaining a normal routine to the extent possible, being honest and accurate, knowing the symptoms of COVID-19, reviewing and modeling basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection, and discussing new rules or practices for school.

### **[Care for Caregivers: Tips for Families and Educators](#)**

#### **National Association of School Psychologists**

- The **National Association of School Psychologists** also offers guidance for caregivers, called **[Care for Caregivers: Tips for Families and Educators](#)**. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers play a critical role in helping children cope with crises, often ignoring their own needs in the process. However, caregivers must take good care of themselves, so they are able to take good care of the children in their charge.

### **[Addressing Grief](#)**

#### **National Association of School Psychologists**

- The **National Association of School Psychologists** also offers brief facts and tips for addressing grief for young people.

### **[Coping with a Crisis Webinar: March 26, 2020, 12:30-1pm](#)**

#### **Mental Health Association in New York State - School Mental Health Resource and Training Center**

(<https://mhanys.org/registration/>)

- Most families will experience a crisis (illness, loss, natural disaster, etc.) at some point. Whether it's family-specific or community-wide, families are impacted differently.
- Created specifically for families and caregivers, the Mental Health Association in New York State is offering a webinar, Coping with a Crisis, to provide knowledge and tools to promote whole family wellness during a time of crisis: recognition of stress indicators, the development of coping strategies and positive communication.
- **[Registration will be available soon on the MHANYS's website](#)**. In addition, the webinar will be archived for viewing at a later time.
- The **[School Mental Health Resource and Training Center](#)** is a project of Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. with funding from the New York State Legislature and

Executive. School Districts and families are encourage to check out the many mental health trainings and resources on its [website](#).

### **[Helping Children After Tragic Events: Stop Watching, Start Talking](#)**

#### **New York State Department of Health**

- Watching and listening to very bad news reports can upset children. Parents, caregivers, teachers, and healthcare providers can do a lot to help children feel safer and less stressed. Turning off the TV and other screens is a good start. News coverage of tragic events is not healthy for kids. Here's why.
  - The constant news of tragic events can be intense and hard to avoid.
  - When an event is on the news around the clock, it doesn't go away for a child.
  - The constant news of the event can hurt a child's mental and physical health. They can feel less secure and safe.
  - Even when an event takes place far away from a child's home, seeing the event on TV can make the child feel like it's a threat to them and the people they love.
  - Mental stress from a disaster can be harder on children than on adults.
  - Children feel less of a sense of control.
  - Children understand less about the situation.
  - Children have fewer experiences bouncing back from hard situations.
  - You can help kids after these events. Here's how.
  - Ask them: What have you already heard about the event? Do you have any questions?
  - Share basic information, not the details.
  - For younger children: turn off the TV, the radio, and the computer or tablet.
  - For older children: watch a news report with them and help them to understand it.
  - Parents, teachers, doctors, and others can make a difference.
- The New York State Department of Health offers further [information for helping children after tragic events on its website](#).

### **[Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)**

#### **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

- The fact sheet [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#) from the **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** provides parents, caregivers, and teachers with strategies for helping children manage their stress during an infectious disease outbreak. It describes potential reactions among youth and the support adults can provide to help them.

### **[Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)**

#### **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

- At this time, information about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving as new details are confirmed and new questions emerge. In the event of an outbreak in your community, as a parent/caregiver, your first concern is about how to protect and take care of your children and family. Knowing important information about the outbreak and learning how to be prepared can reduce your stress and help calm likely anxieties.
- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's** guide [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) will help you think about how an infectious disease outbreak might affect your family—both physically and emotionally—and what you can do to help your family cope.

### **Coronavirus School Response Resources**

#### **New York State School Social Workers' Association**

- **The New York State School Social Workers' Association** offers a compilation of [Coronavirus School Response Resources](#) specific to school social workers, resources specific to New York, resources for children and parents, articles and websites.

#### **New York State Office of Mental Health Crisis Counselors - Call 1-800-273- TALK or text GOT5 to 741741.**

- Are you struggling in the midst of COVID-19? Crisis counselors are still just a phone call or text away.

#### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

- If you or someone you know is suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Trained crisis workers are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your confidential and toll free call goes to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals.

#### **SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)/ 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**

- Free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Utilize the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator.