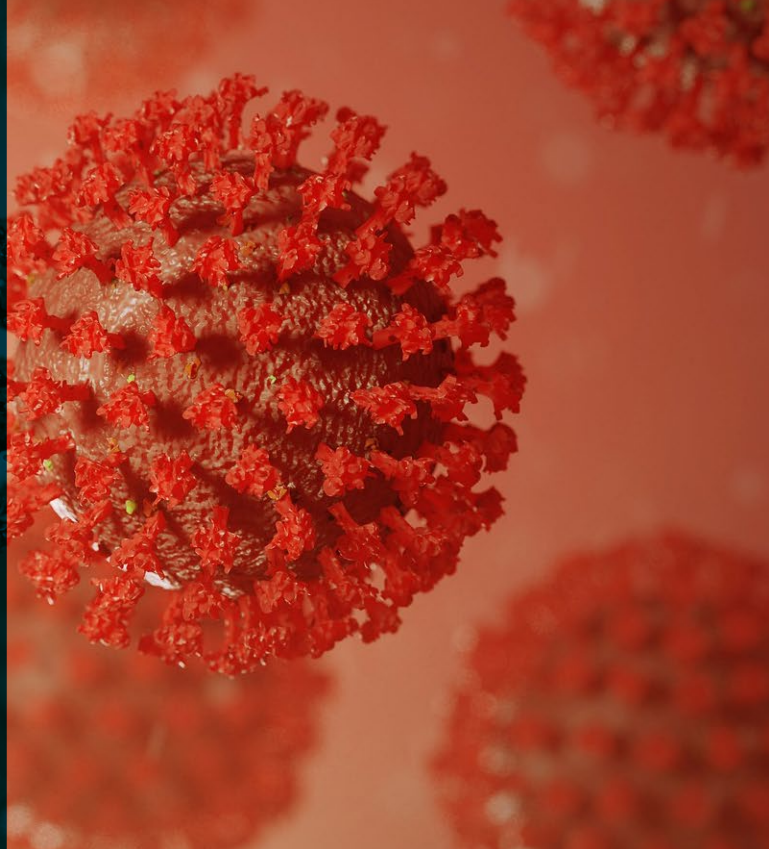


# Support for Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic



The current pandemic is causing distress to students, staff, and the entire community. While it is an unprecedented crisis, many of the strategies that we know are helpful to children during other crisis events can be used now during the pandemic.

**Here are 10 basic steps educators and school administrators can take to create a supportive environment for students.**

## 1. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

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Adults are also impacted by this crisis – in many ways more so than children. Children depend on important adults to be and feel safe and secure. If you are very anxious, sad, or angry, children are likely to be more affected by your emotional state than by what you say to them.

## 2. MAKE A CONNECTION WITH YOUR STUDENTS;

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Help them feel comfortable and at ease. Be kind, calm, and compassionate.

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### **3. DON'T PRETEND THAT EVERYTHING IS OK WHEN IT CLEARLY ISN'T. TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING.**

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Silence says a lot to children – that you are unaware, unconcerned, or unable or unwilling to be of assistance. These are not messages we ever want to communicate to students, especially during a crisis. Students need to see effective models of coping, so it's fine to share with children that you too are worried at times about the pandemic. The goal isn't to share everything that is upsetting, but rather to give an opportunity for you to share effective coping strategies (for example: "When I heard last night that the case numbers were increasing in our community, I was worried and had more trouble falling asleep – but the next morning I talked with my spouse and wrote down my thoughts in a journal and I started to feel better.").

### **4. START BY ASKING STUDENTS WHAT THEY ALREADY KNOW. LISTEN TO THEIR INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS.**

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Don't pretend that they don't or shouldn't be worried, but rather help them learn coping strategies to deal with distressing feelings. Be genuine and honest in your communications. Students can tell when adults are being authentic and they're more likely to confide in adults when that's the case.

### **5. PROVIDE REALISTIC – BUT NOT FALSE – REASSURANCE.**

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Try to convey an overall positive perspective and hope for the future.

### **6. LIMIT YOUR MEDIA CONSUMPTION DURING A CRISIS – MAKE SURE IT IS A HEALTHY DIET AND DON'T CONSUME TOO MUCH.**

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Recommend the same to your students. There are two main reasons to view media coverage during a crisis – to be reassured or to learn practical information about steps to take to keep you and those you care about safe. If you are watching, listening to, or reading media coverage and you aren't feeling reassured or learning new practical information, it's time to disconnect from television, radio, print and social media for a period of time. Connect instead with friends and family.

### **7. WATCH FOR CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUR STUDENTS. REMEMBER THAT CHILDREN MAY NOT SHOW YOU HOW THEY ARE FEELING.**

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Stress-related symptoms may include: fears or anxiety; depressed or irritable moods; changes in sleep (difficulty falling or staying asleep, trouble waking in the morning, or nightmares) or eating (increased or decreased); sadness, depression or social withdrawal; difficulty with concentration or academic performance; physical symptoms (such as headache, stomach aches, or fatigue); grief; or guilt.

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## **8. HELP STUDENTS IDENTIFY OTHERS THEY CAN CONNECT WITH AND TALK TO.**

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Students may not wish at first to accept our invitations to talk or our offers of support. Help them identify others they can go to for support. Remain connected and available and wait until they are ready to accept your invitation. Share these tips with families so that they are better able to support their children.

## **9. SEEK THE ADVICE OF A SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WHENEVER YOU WORRY ABOUT HOW STUDENTS ARE COPING.**

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This is especially important if you worry that students may hurt themselves or others or are engaging in risky behaviors such as drug use.

## **10. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO HELP OTHERS.**

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Being able to assist others during a crisis helps all of us feel less powerless. Remind yourself that you are helping your students – it will help you feel better as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO TALK TO AND SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC, VISIT THE [COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE RESOURCES WEBPAGE](#) OF THE [NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL CRISIS AND BEREAVEMENT](#).

FOR INFORMATION AND FREE RESOURCES ON HOW TO SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS, VISIT THE [COALITION TO SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS](#).