Coping with COVID-19

Our school format has officially turned a new leaf! As the colors change, we can reflect on how this transition to distance learning is working out for people personally, professionally, and academically. As we evaluate how things are going, we can decide whether we’re seeing kids go through normal growing pains for this situation we’re in, or whether someone might be in need of more support.

One great source of support is the Child Mind Institute. Here is a link to their extensive list of information to support our students during the pandemic!

What would make a good school-based mental health referral?

Just as in traditional school years, we can take referrals for any number of reasons. Historically we have seen referrals come in because students have been exhibiting some sort of “big behaviors” such as: walking out of classrooms, tantrums, crying, panic attacks, skipping class, fighting, etc. Now that we have gone to distance learning and hybrid learning practices, these more obvious behaviors may not be as present as they used to be. It is difficult to catch signs of mental distress from behind a computer screen. Here are some things to watch out for, in addition to typical signals, as we move through this new learning style and try to identify those that need some extra support:

- Difficulty sleeping: getting to/staying asleep
- Increase in irritability
- Decrease in ability to focus
- Students who usually show for virtual classes begin to miss or not log on at all

- Persistent sadness or crying spells
- Lack of interest in usual hobbies/activities
- Seeking assurance- “Is everything going to be okay?”
- Students who are usually prompt with homework begin to fall behind
Get my life back: exploring the grief of COVID-19

COVID-19 has brought a lot of grief to the world and taken away milestone events such as Sweet 16’s, Quinceañeras, or graduation ceremonies. It has even taken away social supports and/or opportunities and relational interactions that are so important for human beings. We are all grieving the loss of the life we thought we knew, and we’re grieving all the events we anticipated were coming. We may deny what is happening, get angry about it, bargain and wish for it to be different, feel depressed about it, and/or we may be in a place where we can accept this as part of our lives now. Every birthday, holiday, or other cause for celebration can be a painful reminder of how things used to be. All of these aspects of grief are normal for any type of loss. Grief can make us feel hopeless at times but there are ways to work through it.

According to WholeChildCounseling, a great metaphor to explain grief is a block of ice. Grief can feel like a giant block of ice dropping onto your chest. It is heavy and thick and hard to just get rid of. It makes it difficult to do things as you normally would and may make you lose interest in doing those things all together. However, ice doesn’t last forever, and neither will this block. You start to adapt and change how you do things, and slowly that ice begins to melt away. It is important to remember that any feeling is normal, especially in children. If you are a parent or teacher helping your child or students with their grief – normalize their feelings and take time to talk about it. Additionally, everyone grieves in different ways. Try not to place expectations on yourself or others for how this process looks, feels, or how long it takes to happen. Below is an activity to help connect and process your personal feelings that have come with grief.

Artist’s Corner: “Tangled Ball of Grief”
After sharing this image with the child or individual who is grieving, they can then create their own tangled ball of grief art. All you need is paper and either markers, crayons or colored pencils. The child can make a key and then choose a different color to represent each emotion to then create their own tangled ball of grief. The example shown is from Whole Child Counseling.