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Affirming and Supporting Our Children with SED as They Go Back to School: Considerations for Families, Educators and Community Members

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COVID and SCHOOLING

POLL ONE

• Facts, Awareness, and Tips
What we know about the pandemic’s consequences for education so far helps us plan next steps:

• Learning and development have been interrupted and disrupted for millions of students. More than 1 million* SED students with legal rights to special services did not get them during the pandemic, even more keenly experienced by children of color, and similar issues for students with 504 plans

• The pandemic has exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put low-income and SED students at a disadvantage relative to their peers. – example even pre-COVID 60% of school lacked even the most basic school-based mental health services for children

• One of the most critical opportunity gaps is the uneven access to the devices and internet access critical to learning online.

COVID and SCHOOLING

What we know about the pandemic’s consequences for education so far helps us plan next steps:

• One third of US teachers are at highest risk of severe illness and death from COVID

• Educators concerned about meeting all the needs of their students while maintaining their own health and well-being AND that of their own families are at increased risk of significant impacts from Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

• One third of K-12 teachers say that the pandemic experience is causing them to seriously consider changing their profession

• Teachers are working harder and longer hours, enjoying their work less, feeling less supported, and two thirds feel serious health and safety concerns about being in the classroom

It wasn’t only COVID

The past 1-2 years have highlighted many other areas of disparities and injustice in our communities especially related to race, ethnicity, and language.

Political upheavals have left communities increasingly polarized.
Education in the Post-Covid world:

It’s a volatile cocktail
What do Children and Adults Need right now?
More than Pencils and Notebooks:

Fantasies and fears of kids with SED in the backpack

I am really different – no one can understand my life

Kids with SED are “2nd rate” so I am doomed to fail

I’m too far behind, I will never catch up

Trauma triggers are lurking everywhere and pop-up when least expected
Impact of Fantasies, Fears and Trauma

Fantasies and fears of kids with SED in the backpack

• Self-fulfilling failure prophecies
• Grief, loss, separation anxiety and trauma triggers make concentration difficult
• May demonstrate trauma symptoms masking as ADD/ADHD, ODD, or other behavioral or mental health issues
• May experience frequent psychosomatic symptoms
• Easily launched into survival mode
• Social anxiety - “I don’t/can’t fit in”; “Nobody likes me” or “Nobody will like me if they know my real story”
• Falling behind academically
• Missed special education needs
• Mis-labeled or placed in special education
Circle of Security

Parent attending to the child’s needs

- Secure Base: Support My Exploration
  - Watch over me
  - Delight in me
  - Help me
  - Enjoy with me
- Safe Haven: Welcome My Coming To You
  - I need you to...
- I need you to...

Always: be BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER, and KIND.
Whenever possible: follow my child’s need.
Whenever necessary: take charge.

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Circle of Security

Parent attending to the youth’s needs

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organise my feelings

Secure Base
- Support my exploration
- * Watch over me.
- * Delight in me.
- * Look for signs I need help, and be available.
- * Enjoy... with me.

Safe Haven
- Welcome my coming to you
- ALWAYS: be BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER and KIND
  Wherever possible: follow the child’s needs
  Wherever necessary: take charge

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Support Family Resilience

• Individual resilience contributes to but is not the same as family resilience

• 4 core signs of a resilient family during times of crisis or prolonged stress
  ✓ Maintaining membership
  ✓ Nurturing young
  ✓ Caring for vulnerable
  ✓ Maintaining economic support
Support Family Resilience

• 4 core characteristics of a resilient family during times or crisis or prolonged stress
  ✓ Hope, optimism, shared beliefs, values
  ✓ Communicate about a wide range of feelings
  ✓ Balance of consistency and flexibility
  ✓ Capacity for problem solving
Support Family Resilience

Family Resilience

- Family Belief Systems
  - Making Meaning out of Adversity
  - Positive Outlook - Hope
  - Transcendence and Spirituality

- Family Organizational Patterns
  - Flexibility to Adapt
  - Connectedness and Mutual Support
  - Kin, Social, Economic Resources

- Communication and Problem Solving
  - Clarity of Communication
  - Open Emotional Expression/Sharing
  - Collaborative Problem Solving and Proaction
Quick Tips for Periods of Adjustment and Transition

- Relationships matter more than schoolwork (SEL)
- Know the kids, the parents, the staff and the community
- Addressing post-COVID needs is more than re-starting pre-COVID approaches
- Not the time to do long-term special education assessments – although immediate assessment is needed for many students
- Attend to needs of teachers and staff as well as students

https://www.childtrends.org/blog/as-schools-reopen-addressing-covid-19-related-trauma-and-mental-health-issues-will-take-more-than-mental-health-services
Broad Tips for Parents/Caregivers from “Experts”

POLL TWO

• Locate learning resources

• Identify additional resources

• Connect with school staff

• Be pro-active about making your needs and expectations clear (i.e. around mask wearing)

• Be flexible and accepting of the needs and expectations of the other students/parents and school staff

## Tips for Parents at Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relax</th>
<th>Relax the rules</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Use resources but don’t get overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow</td>
<td>Follow the child’s interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOVE</td>
<td>MOVE our bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build in</td>
<td>Build in some one-on-one time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Predictability

• Predictable environment
• Predictable use of time and routines
• Predictable rules and expectations
• Predictable consequences
• Predictable is NOT rigid!
Develop Strategies for Transitions

Make them as calm and peaceful as possible
Activities and Actions:

Help child/adult to identify:

• What activities strengthen you?
• What activities calm you?
• What activities nurture your goals and ability to dream?
Balance Mind, Body, Heart, Spirit, Senses:

• Re-set the brain with breathing
• Move your body
• Nurture creativity
• Laugh and Play
Communicate and Connect

- Eat meals together
- Show affection (use of touch)
- Never hinge relationships on behavior
Beyond Covid

• Facts, Awareness and Tips
Support Physical and Psychological Safety

• Ensure that there is an identified “go-to” person or liaison for youth with SED, their parents/caregivers (and caseworkers where applicable)

• Provide choice and control wherever and whenever possible

• Ensure that anti-bullying, community-building, and school-climate policies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all types of SED

• Ensure that youth with SED do not receive harsher or socially isolating disciplinary actions

• Proactively address differences in parental needs/expectations regarding issues such as vaccination and mask-wearing
Support Stability

• Provide meaningful and concrete supports to caregiving families

• Ensure communication, engagement and collaboration between school, families and providers

• Minimize classroom and school placement changes and teacher changes for students with SED and all students
Support Well-Being: Trauma and Resilience

• Provide training, coaching and supporting for ensuring schools are trauma informed, trauma responsive and resiliency focused

• Help youth learn self-regulation skills

• Provide multi-sensory tools (including designated safe spaces) for emotional expression, management and regulation
How is the child feeling – anticipate concerns and questions

Child’s understanding of certain information they heard related to COVID, vaccines, other issues in the community or country

WHO is the child worried about
Support Well-Being: Transition

- Fully engage youth and their parents/caregivers in transition planning
- Ensure that life transition planning and school transition planning are in sync
- Ensure youth transitioning into adulthood have access to relevant ID, transcripts, medical documents, credit repair and related resources
- Provide meaningful access and resources related to a full array of post-secondary opportunities to youth including
  - Pre-college and college
  - Technical or vocational
  - Advanced placement and credit options
  - School-to-work options
Support Well-Being: Advocacy

• Ensure that both youth and parents/caregiving adults understand all their legal rights related to education

• Engage students in identifying and expressing their own educational and life goals and equip them to advocate for their own goals

• Equip caregiving adults with tools to facilitate effective educational advocacy including IEP or 504 plan participation
Promote Broader School-Based Activities

• Use and promote positive, appropriate and sensitive language related to race, gender/sexuality, special needs, health/mental health, family composition, SES, etc.

• Engage parent support groups

• Provide books and resources for the classroom teacher and the library that promote engagement and understanding
Questions and Contact Information

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