

A Message from the School Counseling Department

Practical guidance for navigating the weeks ahead

1) Embark with enthusiasm. It is easier to transfer anxious energy to “excitement”, than to “calm”. Not excitement for a pandemic of course, but to create some aspects of this that can be positive. For parents, “I have a new opportunity to spend time with my children and be more involved in their education”. After all, the older they get the fewer opportunities there are. If your teens are not sharing in this enthusiasm, try not to be offended; their brain is wired to crave social interaction and approval. Find opportunities for them to continue some social interaction with distancing. If they have younger siblings at home, find ways they can serve as leaders in the house. Also, carve out some time to spend together doing something they enjoy that is different from the younger ones in the house.

2) Keep a healthy perspective. The course of events that have unfolded are unlike anything we have seen in our lifetime. It is important to validate that the anxiety is a response to the fact that this is very new and unknown, and your mind may be shouting, “Don’t trust this! Proceed with caution!” Our response is to acknowledge this fact, and then acknowledge the additional facts about the situation. When you get a text from someone making a claim about the situation. Check your news sources before reacting. The [CDC](#) is the best source for all valid information.

It is important to let your children know they are safe and that the things we are doing are strategies to keep you safe. Most kids and adolescents are most concerned with how the situation affects them directly and those they love. Speak to those areas to calm fears. You may remind them that historically, quarantines have been done before, and they helped a lot of people stay safe. It is also just temporary.

More helpful tips for coping and helping your children cope can be found [here](#).

3) Create a daily rhythm. For most parents and students, the idea of distance learning can be daunting and overwhelming. Give yourself a lot of grace, and know that your teachers and all the Priority staff are here to support you in this.

When learning from home, it can be helpful to structure your day with the same rhythm of your school day. You may not need to be concerned with the time slots (depending on the class), simply the cadence of your day: Learning blocks, play blocks, and eating blocks. Block your time in that manner. Also, capitalize on the points in your day when you have the most energy. Tackle the most tedious challenges during your energy peaks, and ensure you have rest time during your energy lulls.

Doing work from home is not the same as being in school all day. You will likely find ways to be efficient with your time. Parents may find some helpful tips for schedules [here](#).

4) Do things that are healthy. Of course, this applies to physical health, but it also greatly applies to your mental health. If I am trolling news stories and social media obsessively, I am probably going to feel

obsessed, overwhelmed, and drained. If I practice a healthy dose of knowledge in order to take healthy action, that is going to help me feel more in control.

Focus on what is in my power/control, not what isn't. If I spend my time angry about the situation or how things are being handled, I am likely wasting a lot of energy and just "drinking my own poison". Instead, focus my energy on what is in my power, i.e. projects and hobbies I have been wanting to work on, getting a chance to sleep in, acts of kindness for others, getting my work done and feeling a sense of accomplishment, etc.

Gratitude is mood boosting. Find things throughout your day you are grateful for. There is always someone in a worse situation. Maybe take the next step to think of something nice to do for others.

Altruism is also incredibly mood boosting. We see our communities coming together and supporting one another; find a way to be a part of that. Consider those in your life who may be feeling most isolated and come up with creative ways to reach out to them.

Most importantly, pray. Rightly order your day with prayer. There are many churches that are live streaming services and praise and worship to bring community prayer into your home. Keep watch for what our chaplaincy team will be offering during this time. We are an Easter people, and we know times of challenge and suffering bring grace and transformation.

5) Reach out. We are here for you. Priory faculty and staff will be accessible throughout your school day. Mrs. Materniak and Mr. Mitchom will be available to have individual sessions via Zoom meeting calls. Simply complete the counselor request form under resources on Mypriority to make the request. We will also reach out periodically to check in on students and families.

Be sure to reach out to friends and family. Facetime and phone calls are so important to keeping your sanity and feeling connected.

We are in this together as a community and will face it together. Many blessings will come out of this time of challenge, growth and learning. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.

Peace of Christ be with you all,

Mrs. Materniak and Mr. Mitchom