

LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT - MODEL & TEACH

Scripts adapted for the Mt. Lebanon School District for re-engagement of learning in response to the 2020 Pandemic school closure.

As educators, we are in a position to help our students after a disaster, infectious disease outbreak, school crisis or other emergency. Just as we engage in developmentally appropriate academic, social and emotional learning practices under typical circumstances, we can utilize these same skills to help students reduce stress and facilitate learning regardless of the platform or environment.

This 5-step framework of cognitive learning and behavior, supported by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and the National Institute of Mental Health, helps students put their experiences and feelings into words, provides support and encouragement, encourages social problem solving, models calm and optimistic behavior and teaches others about the effects of stress (Wong & NACTATR, 2020).

DAY 1.....	p. 2-3
DAY 2.....	p. 4-5
DAY 3.....	p. 6-8
DAY 4.....	p. 9-10
DAY 5.....	p. 11-12

Day 1	
<p>Teacher:</p> <p>I am so happy to see all of you and start a new school year. We will be spending some time each morning for the first several days of school talking about how our lives have been impacted by COVID-19. During these conversations, we will focus on strategies that we can use to problem-solve, connect with others, and help manage our emotions.</p> <p>Many of the adults at school, from the nurses, to the principals, teachers, counselors, and janitors, as well as parents and other community members, have been working in teams throughout the summer to make plans to help ensure that we all stay safe and healthy. These plans have been developed based on recommendations from many experts who study science, medicine, and public health, like the Center for Disease Control, or the CDC, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the Allegheny County Health Department.</p> <p>In order to follow these recommendations and help ensure we all stay healthy and safe, it was decided that we will be starting the school year with remote instruction. You might be excited about this, but you might be disappointed that you will not be <u>starting</u> the school year back in the building. You might have mixed feelings about it, and these might change from day-to-day. These feelings are normal. Keep in mind that there are changes that we experience with the start of any school year. You have new teachers and new classmates, and things are not exactly the same as the year before. Initially, this may feel uncomfortable. However, you adapt to those differences once you become more familiar with your schedule, your teachers, and your peers, and you get settled into a new routine.</p> <p>While we cannot control how we are starting the school year, we can control how we think about it and react to it. For example, a new school year also brings new opportunities, and these can be exciting and energizing! Take a moment to think about what it is that you look forward to this year. [Pause 10 seconds]. I'll be coming back to this at the end of our conversation this morning.</p>	<p>MODEL & PROTECT</p>

<p>Let's take a minute to talk about the term Coronavirus, or COVID-19, and how doctors and scientists arrived at this name. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Doctors and scientists have studied other, existing coronaviruses and have developed ways to control their spread, such as through prevention and treatment measures. The current coronavirus, however, is a new, or novel, virus. You may have even heard it referred to as a "novel coronavirus." Novel in this sense is not referring to a book, but rather to something that is new. When something is new, it takes time to learn more about and understand.</p> <p>So where does the term COVID-19 come from? The "CO" stands for Corona, "VI" for virus, and "D" for disease; "19" is included because the disease emerged in 2019. Doctors and scientists have encouraged us to use many strategies to stay healthy because they help protect us from germs and prevent germs from spreading. We all have to use the same healthy habits no matter how we look or where we are from. Teasing someone who has had the virus or has had family members with the virus, or blaming a person or people who are of Chinese or Asian descent for COVID-19 is NOT acceptable and will not be tolerated. Even if we think we are joking, we are not treating the other person or other people with respect or fairness. COVID-19 is a virus, not a person.</p> <p>Earlier, I asked you to think about what it is that you are looking forward to this school year. I'll start by sharing what I am looking forward to this year. [Teacher offers own and models optimism].</p> <p>(Q): Does anyone else want to share what they are looking forward to this school year?</p> <p>Thank you for sharing. This year will truly be new to <i>all</i> of us in many ways. It may take a little while longer to get used to, but we will work through these changes together. I am always here to help you, and so are all of the other teachers, counselors, and administrators at school. We are here to support you.</p>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Core elements</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acknowledge the disruption to school and many other aspects of daily life</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Demonstrate a positive and optimistic approach</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Re-establish physical and emotional safety through information about what is being done</i></p>	

Day 2

Teacher:

There has been a lot of information and discussion in the news about the [strategies](#) we can use in response to COVID-19 to help ensure we all stay physically healthy. However, it is equally as important to think about how the circumstances around COVID-19 make us feel emotionally, and the strategies we can use to help cope with our difficult feelings.

Even though we all were impacted by COVID-19 in some similar ways, such as learning and working at home, we each had and continue to have different experiences in our lives because of the situation. Likewise, even though we all may have had some common thoughts and feelings, we each have our own reactions. Your reactions may differ from those of a sibling, a parent, or a friend, and this may leave you wondering if anyone feels the way that you do.

We know that there are some common reactions to COVID-19 and other, similar critical incidents for individuals your age. Let's watch [this](#) short video about a group of teenagers' reactions to COVID-19.

These teenagers had a lot of different feelings.

(Q): What were some of these feelings or reactions?

**If students are reluctant to share, give examples. "I heard a couple of teenagers express..."*

- Worries about their own safety or the safety of others; in this case, worrying about getting sick and worrying about being a carrier and spreading germs to others
- Difficulties concentrating or getting schoolwork done, and feeling unproductive
- Feeling lonely, even after talking with friends
- Feeling grateful for more time with family

(Q): Was there anything that they missed?

TEACH

<p>Other common reactions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling irritable or frustrated quickly and easily ● Changes in appetite, such as feeling more hungry or less hungry ● Confusion about who or what to believe ● Anger or resentment about the things you may have missed or had to experience differently ● Excitement about remote learning, or maybe disappointment about not being back in the school building <p>There have been many things to adjust to over the past few months, all of which can create a lot of feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel. These feelings can change from day-to-day, and this is normal. The good news is that there are strategies we can use to help manage our feelings and reactions. It is natural for you to want to talk about those right now, but we are going to get into deeper discussions about strategies the next two days. Take some time to think about it tonight. Reflect on the ways that you have problem-solved to work through these times.</p>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Core elements:</i></p> <p><i>Help students understand the range of common reactions to the specific critical incident</i></p>	

Day 3	
<p>Teacher:</p> <p>Before we start today's discussion, I just wanted to say how proud I am of how well everyone is adjusting to the changes with school. Some things that I have noticed going well so far include...[teachers give 3-5 examples of things that they have experienced or witnessed].</p> <p>Yesterday, we talked about some of the common feelings and reactions that teenagers tend to have during or after a critical incident, like COVID-19. You may have spent some time last night thinking more about your own feelings and reactions, and how those might have changed over time. You might have talked to a parent or trusted friend about your feelings. It is common to experience a wide range of emotions, and to want to talk with others about those feelings.</p> <p>There are many strategies we can use to help us manage our emotions and our reactions to changes, discomfort, stress, and uncertainty. Given all the concern that we heard from you, the students, and from your parents about your need for socialization, we are going to start our discussion about strategies by talking about social support. We will focus on how relationships can help us feel better - by staying connected, helping others, and feeling supported by others. One of the things that makes COVID-19 so different from other critical events (e.g., emergencies, natural disasters) is that we have to limit our physical interactions with others in order to stay healthy. With school closed and sporting events canceled, students have had to miss things they looked forward to, like prom, graduation, tournaments, trips, parties, and performances, and this may have been incredibly disappointing. Physical distancing can be a lot to ask, but it's also a huge way to help others.</p> <p>There are a number of ways that families, teachers, friends, classmates, and teammates have found to stay connected with others during the time of physical distancing. Connecting with others can be a powerful way to help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Let's talk about some of the ways you found to connect with others.</p> <p>Allow students to share out.</p>	<p>CONNECT</p>

<p><i>[Give additional examples, if needed]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Talk through FaceTime, Zoom, or Google Meet</i> • <i>Send handwritten cards, drawings, or postcards</i> • <i>Create videos with messages to let others know you are thinking about them</i> • <i>Practice an instrument or sport virtually</i> • <i>Participate in a virtual book club or movie club</i> • <i>Attend a virtual service of a place of worship (e.g., church, synagogue, mosque, temple)</i> <p>Take a minute to think about how these made you feel, and which you would like to do more of.</p> <p>(Q): What are some actions you can take now and over the next few weeks to help yourself or others feel connected with school? I would like to record your ideas and share them with (the principals) so they know all of the ways you have thought about.</p> <p><i>[Provide examples to get the conversation started, if needed: start a virtual lunch group or study group, email/call/text a classmate you have not seen in awhile]</i></p> <p>(Q): What are some actions we can take <u>as a class</u> to help each other stay connected with school?</p> <p>These are all really great ideas. As time goes on, you may think of other ideas. If you do, please share them! You can always talk with me or any of your teachers, a counselor, or a principal about your thoughts and ideas. We are here to listen and help support you.</p>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Core elements:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Re-establish feelings of physical and emotional safety</i> <i>Help students re-establish social relationships and stay connected with others</i> <i>Convey interest and availability</i></p>	

Day 4

Teacher:

Yesterday, we talked about the importance of social support to our emotional well-being and strategies for staying connected with others. Today we are going to talk about other strategies that can help us manage our feelings and reactions. Just as physical distancing is a strategy to help prevent the spread of the virus, there are tools we can use to help us feel better. Research tells us that there are many strategies that we can use each day:

- Consistent daily routines - Establishing regular routines can give us a sense of predictability about our day and help us stay on track. Just as sleep itself is important, having a regular bedtime and consistent waking time during the week and even on the weekends can be an important part of your daily routine. You might develop a schedule that includes homework, meals, chores, and physical activity. Plan for times that you may need to share technology with a family member, such as a sibling.
- Daily physical activity and exercise - Most people tend to think about exercise as being good for our physical health. But research tells us that it is also good for our mental health. There is even a saying that goes, “What’s good for your bicep is good for your brain!” You might take the dog for a walk, go for a bike ride, try yoga, help with housework or yard work, lift weights, shoot some hoops, dance in your living room, and so on.
- Sleep - Sleep is also important to both your physical and mental health. It allows your mind to digest and make sense of the day’s events. It prepares your brain for learning new things the next day. With all of the growing that is happening in your body and brain, individuals your age are encouraged to get about 8-10 hours of sleep each night. I know it can be difficult to resist checking your phone or scrolling through social media posts before bed; this is often true for adults as well. But a more helpful pre-bedtime routine is one that calms you and your brain down. For some, that might include writing in a journal, reading a chapter in a book, listening to music, or organizing your workspace for the next day. Try to avoid screen time for about an hour before bed.
- Healthy nutrition - Remember that food is energy for your body and brain. Try to eat well balanced and regular meals. It might help to feel some ownership by helping to plan or even prepare meals at home.

TEACH

<p>Many of these are good self-care strategies in general. Exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, and getting enough sleep not only help us emotionally, but they also help to develop our immune systems to fight off illnesses. No one strategy will work for everyone, and it is likely that you will benefit from using several strategies.</p> <p>(Q): What are some strategies you found to be helpful? Did any of them fall into one or more of these categories?</p> <p>(Q): What are some other strategies that you found to be helpful?</p> <p><i>[Some other strategies to help manage stress for discussion may include]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Talking with a friend, sibling, parent or grandparent, a trusted adult at school</i> • <i>Finding creative or artistic outlets, like drawing, painting, writing, playing music, etc.</i> • <i>Volunteering or contributing to the community, such as shopping for an elderly neighbor or making masks</i> • <i>Using deep breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation</i> • <i>Practicing mindfulness strategies</i> • <i>Focusing on the things you can control</i> • <i>Keeping a journal</i> • <i>Trying to learn something new</i> • <i>Setting a goal - Writing down a goal or two not only helps us focus on something we want to accomplish, but it also makes us more likely to commit to it.</i> <p>What I am hearing is that you are all really thinking about tools and strategies you can use to help yourself, including thinking of creative ways to keep doing the things that you enjoy, being open to new ideas, and adapting to change. These are also really important ways in which we learn and grow as individuals throughout life.</p>	
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Core elements:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Help students identify constructive ways of adapting and coping</i> <i>Give students an opportunity to share their experiences</i></p>	

Day 5	
<p>Teacher: Good morning, everyone! Maybe you are wide awake and ready for school today or maybe you are feeling sleepy and still waking up, or maybe you are having other feelings, but I'm happy to see you. Now that we have been back to school for several days, I want to hear how you think things are going.</p> <p>(Q): Which changes have been easier for you to get used to so far? (Q): Which changes have been more challenging?</p> <p>We have spent the past few days discussing the importance of healthy habits and routines to our physical health and to our emotional health. We have also brainstormed a number of strategies that can help us feel better and stay connected with others.</p> <p>(Q): Which strategies resonated with you? (Q): Which one or two strategies will you commit to trying today and this weekend? (Q): How can you use some of these strategies now and in the future?</p> <p>Remember, I am always here to help you, and so are all of the other adults at school, <u>even the ones you may not see every day</u>. It may feel like all of this will last forever, but it is important to remember that this is a temporary situation. All of the measures we have taken and discussed this week are to help ensure your physical, social, and emotional well-being and success throughout the year.</p> <p>If you notice that you are feeling down, feeling stuck, or just do not feel like yourself and you want to talk with someone, there are many people you can talk to. You might talk to a family member who you live with, extended family who do not live with you, or a close friend. You might talk to a teacher, a coach, a school counselor, a nurse, a band director, or another adult at school, or other people outside of your home, like a doctor or counselor. Sometimes students do not ask for help because they worry that other people won't listen or don't have time to listen, or they worry what people will think of them. It might help to think about a person you trust, who listens to you, and who can help you. Let them know you want to talk with them, and ask when a good time would be. Remember that we are also here to listen and help if you have concerns about a friend or</p>	<p>LISTEN & PROTECT</p>

classmate. You all do a nice job of looking out for each other, and we want that to continue even when we are learning outside of the school building.	
<p><i>Core elements:</i></p> <p><i>Convey interest and availability</i></p> <p><i>Re-establish feelings of physical and emotional safety</i></p>	

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