

Mental Health Minute

Associated Clinic of Psychology

Back To School and Renewed COVID-19 Anxiety

As school was ending last school year, it seemed as though we were finally getting on the other side of this pandemic and seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. As case rates from the delta variant are surging, that rising dread and panic related to the pandemic is emerging once again. New questions and concerns about what this school year holds are whirling around everyone's mind. As parents, students, and teachers ponder what it means to have children back in the building, it's a good idea to revisit some strategies on managing those anxieties.



Frustration, Anxiety, and Grief

This pandemic has been traumatic and stressors seem to just keep piling on. As this continues to take a toll on our bodies and minds, reprioritizing connection with loved ones, good sleep, healthy diet, and frequent exercise is important in helping us to be healthy enough to process through this. Try to create a healthy routine where you can fit it in!



Decision Fatigue

We're tired and exhausted and information continues to be pouring over us. It's completely normal to feel fatigued with all the decisions we have to make day-in and day-out, even the daily mundane decisions. When we have decision fatigue, our reactions can become out of proportion to the reality. Take a breath, give yourself a little time to process through the information before making decisions, and remember to give yourself (and those around you) a little grace as we continue to navigate through this.



Maintaining Hope

It's understandable that many of us are grieving life as we knew it and we are all emotionally exhausted. Even though that light at the end of the tunnel seems to continuously be pushed out further, it is there! Try not to drive yourself crazy with fears of the unknown and what we cannot control, manage expectations of what life may look like in the immediate future, and maintain hope that this is NOT forever.

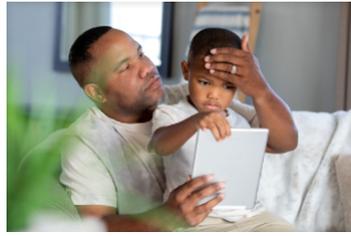
For Kids and Students

Just as this has been difficult for adults, our kids and students may also be having a hard time, especially with the transition back to full day school following a very tumultuous year. Here are some signs to watch out for and some strategies to use to help support them through this.



Behavior Changes

Stress can manifest itself through changes in behavior. For children, some common changes include irritability or moodiness, withdrawing from once-pleasurable activities, verbally expressing worries, crying, complaining about school or refusing to go to school, clinging to teachers or parents, difficulty sleeping, and eating troubles. For teens, some behavior changes to watch out for are: significantly avoiding parents, abandoning long-term friendships for new ones, and hostility towards family members.



Physical Symptoms

Stress can also appear as physical symptoms and may result in a lot of trips to the school nurse. Headaches and stomachaches are common physical symptoms. Parents should always consult with the pediatrician if these complaints become frequent, but this may also be an indication of stress. These symptoms showing up with certain situations (such as tests) may also give adults some insight into if the symptoms are stress related.



Social Interactions

Watch for how kids and students are interacting with their peers. If they seem fine at home, but are acting in unusual ways at school or in peer social situations, this may be an indication of them experiencing anxiety. This might include conflict with peers, impulsiveness in interactions, or isolation from others.



Stay In Tune

Listen for word usage such as "worried," "confused," "annoyed," and "angry." Often children are not familiar with the word stress and what it may mean. Also listen for negative statements kids and teens may be saying about themselves, others, their environment, or the world around them. Phrases such as "I'm stupid," "no one likes me," and "I hate this place" may be indicators of sources of stress.



Validate

You don't have to agree with them, but it's always helpful when there is understanding of feelings. Let kids know that it's okay to feel sad, angry, and stressed, and that this is a normal feeling that many people and other children are experiencing right now.

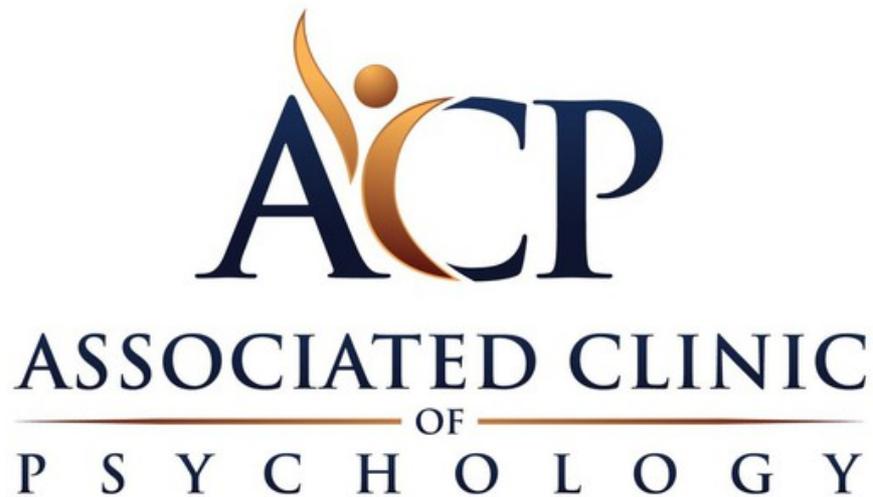


Seek Support

Parents are not alone in this! Reach out to the schools for wrap around support when kids are at school. Teachers, collaborate and communicate with your teams when you have concerns about a student. We could all use a little help right now.

Help Is Available!

It typically takes a few weeks of adjustment before kids are used to their new routines and schedules. If you notice significant changes in your child's behavior, such as sleep problems, major appetite changes, behavior or mood changes, or anxiety that makes it difficult for them to function, seek out support and consultation. Associated Clinic of Psychology is here to provide mental health services to students and their families. Consult with your child's school counselor or contact us directly with questions. www.acp-mn.com or 612-455-8643.



Educator Resilience Program

Associated Clinic of Psychology is offering a FREE resiliency initiative to support all educators and support staff with brief, confidential phone coaching sessions to help with managing the COVID-19/back-to-school emotional, physical, and cognitive toll. This will be done with a licensed ACP clinician, separate from the clinician assigned to your school. We're here to help in whatever way we can!

How can you access the Educator Resilience Program?

- Call (612) 455-8646
- Please mention the Educator Resilience Program, leave a voicemail with your name, contact info, and two dates/times you are available to talk.
- After we receive your message and assign a provider, you will receive a call back confirming your session date and time.

TAKE CARE
OF YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH

-XOXO



*****This newsletter was created by Sarah Najafalipour, MA, LPCC*****