



Mental Health and Wellness Through the Pandemic

Connect to health & well-being

The Pandemic's Toll

- Nationwide study (Stanford's Challenge Success) showed that 56% of students reported an increase in stress during the pandemic.
- Isolation and challenges of remote learning have been big stressors.
- The same study states that 42% of students say they're more disengaged.
- 50% of students say their relationships with teachers have gotten worse.

Mental Health Impact

- School closures and social isolation have affected all students, but particularly those living in poverty.
- Adding to the damage to their learning, a mental health crisis is emerging as many students have lost access to services that were offered by schools.
- Schools are “the de facto mental health system for many children and adolescents,” providing mental health services to 57 percent of adolescents who need care.

Impact on Education

- Mental health and academic achievement are linked, research shows.
- Chronic stress changes the chemical and physical structure of the brain, impairing cognitive skills like attention, concentration, memory, and creativity.

Understand the warning signs of stress.

- Children at any age experience stress and it may present differently from child to child.
- However, in teens stress warning signs typically are;
 - change in sleep habits,
 - irritability/acting out,
 - change in appetite,
 - loss of interest in activities that previously brought them joy,
 - difficulty concentrating, isolation or withdrawal,
 - poor school performance,
 - use of alcohol or drugs.

Healthy Ways to Cope With Stress

- Understanding that stress relieving activities should be happening consistently.
- Engaging in the following activities will help individuals release stress in a positive way:
 - physical activity,
 - deep breathing,
 - engaging in activities that help your student or child develop meaningful connections with others,
 - laughter, creative expression, and
 - addressing the negative emotions that accompany stress.

Take care of your body.

- Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
- Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco, and substance use.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.

- Connect with others.
- Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Connect with your community- or faith-based organizations.
- While social distancing measures are in place, try connecting online, through social media, or by phone or mail.

Focus on the relationship.

- Fear and anxiety about the pandemic—coupled with uncertainty about the future—can be disruptive to a student’s ability to come to school ready to learn.
- Teachers can act as a powerful buffer against the adverse effects of trauma by helping to establish a safe and supportive environment for learning. From morning meetings to regular check-ins with students.
- Parents take the time to check in during device free moments.
- This helps build meaningful connections and will assist you in knowing your child's warning signs for when they are becoming stressed and will help your child open up to you to share what they may be stressed about.

Connections Matter

- The foundations of our brains are established in early childhood. However, the connections and pathways within them evolve over the course of our lifetimes, depending on experience.
- In order to have healthy outcomes in our adult lives, it is important that, as children, we have the necessary support that we need.

- Without these connections to buffer us in times of stress, we do not fully develop our abilities to cope and to thrive - this lack of development can lead to mental, emotional, and behavioral issues.
- Healthy connections help us to build resilience, which ultimately leads to more wholesome futures.

— CONNECTIONS MATTER —

80%

OF BRAIN GROWTH
HAPPENS IN THE FIRST
3 YEARS
OF LIFE.



CARING INTERACTIONS DEVELOP POSITIVE BRAIN CONNECTIONS THAT IMPROVE:

Mental and physical health • Thinking and learning • Managing stress



AS A RESULT,
COMMUNITIES GROW STRONG,
SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL.



BUT STILL TODAY



Individuals are more isolated
than in previous times



Without support,
people find unhealthy
ways to cope



Ongoing stress can lead to
poor health and well-being

WHAT'S YOUR CONNECTION?



Reach out to
a neighbor



Spend time with a child
without electronics



Listen to
someone's story



Make a meal
for a parent

CONNECTIONS MATTER
developing brain-relationships-communities

 connectionsmatter.org

Connections Matter is a community effort.

- Connections Matter is a community-based initiative that explores how the connections we make in life profoundly impact our brain's ability to grow and our own individual abilities to cope and thrive.
- Through the workshops and trainings, CM educates the public on the intersecting topics of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma, brain development, and resilience.

- CM utilizes an evidence-informed program, along with real-world and concrete examples, to demonstrate how ACEs adversely affect brain development and health outcomes - and how caring connections serve as a primary buffer in the negative effects of trauma.
- Connections Matter ultimately strives to promote the building of more resilient, compassionate, and trauma-informed communities - thus allowing all children and individuals to succeed.
- Made possible to WellStone through a grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville.

Validate

- When we hear that someone is struggling, our instinct is to start offering solutions.
- But what we challenge everyone to do is to take a moment and validate the other person's experience.
- Don't jump to say, "Oh, it's not that bad!" or "It could be so much worse!" This makes the other person feel worse.
- Instead, make it clear that you hear them and understand their challenges, even if they are very different from your own.

Appreciate

- The next step is to admire the courage it took to admit something so personal. It is very hard to ask for help, whether you're 18 or 68 years old.
- We know that sharing when we're struggling and asking for help is a key piece of succeeding in life, but we don't always talk about it.

Refer

- Now that you've helped your student feel more comfortable expressing themselves, it's time to take concrete action.
- Don't just offer up a list of counseling services. Ask questions to help your young adult explore the different ideas for where help can come from.
- Remember that what works for you may not work for them. We all have our own best way forward.

Get Support

- When the symptoms of stress begin impacting the day-to-day function of a child or teen then help from a mental health professional is needed.
- Seek help from these places when in crisis.
 - Nova Center [256-705-6493](tel:256-705-6493)
 - Huntsville Hospital Women's and Children's ER
 - Crisis Services of North Alabama Madison [256-716-4052](tel:256-716-4052)
 - Alabama Suicide Prevention
 - **LGBTQ Teens** 1-866-850-8078
 - **Youth** 1-800-252-TEEN
 - Speak Suicide Hotline 1-800-273-8255

Questions and Answers?



Thank You!

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