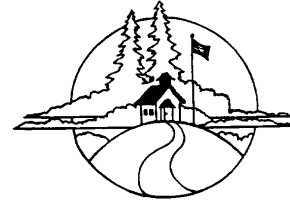


VERNONIA SCHOOL DISTRICT 47J



March 23, 2020

Hello Parents, Caregivers and Guardians,

How are you holding up so far? Stress, worry, fear and a mix of emotions are likely high at this time of uncertainty. We're all figuring this out as we go together on how to support one another, especially YOU and your family. We are still in the "honeymoon" phase of this. As this goes on, I anticipate that it will tax us emotionally and increasingly activate our anxiety for various reasons. As a result, it is important that we're starting now to work on building up our strategies for support and navigating distress.

Below you'll find suggestions, videos and articles you may find helpful:

- **Messaging:** We cannot always control media messaging from various sources, but we CAN be intentional how we talk to our children about the pandemic. Messaging is crucial to ensure a sense of emotional safety as well as behavior changes for physical safety precaution. Here is a helpful link of [How to talk to your kids about Coronavirus in an age appropriate way](#)
- **Reality Check for Young People:** We are not invincible! No one is immune to contract the virus with harsh symptoms or being a carrier. I've found myself reminding young adults and older teens that staying isolated isn't just about protecting you but about the community, specifically your grandparents and other older and more medically fragile people with higher likelihood of fatality. An important moment to put others ahead of ourselves. See link for additional information: [Younger Adults Make Up Big Portion of Coronavirus Hospitalizations in U.S.](#)
- **Opportunity Family Bonding:** This is a unique opportunity to strengthen our family relationships and get to know one another better. While this may be one of the hardest things we've gone through as individuals or as a family, that also means that this has the potential to be one of the most growth enhancing experiences we've had as well. *(See 7 Strengths Learning Literacy Family Messages document)*
- **Model Healthy Stress Relief:** Now may be the opportune time to try something you've thought about in the past, but never followed through with—like yoga, meditation, or a long novel or comedy series you've heard is great. Show your kids that times may be tough, but you and they are as well, and finding some inner peace or laughter is something we should all work into our daily schedules.
- **Realign Purpose & Altruism:** One way to cope with this is to remind ourselves that what we're doing is bigger than us and about supporting the larger community. Having a sense of purpose for our suffering makes it much more manageable. Troubled times provide ample opportunities to help out others in need, and altruism is a proven method to counteract negative emotions. We can choose to look at this time period as a rich opening to develop new or deeper relationships with neighbors, fellow parents in our kids' academics and the entire community. Seek out opportunities for kindness and support.
- **Emotions Are Never Wrong.** We all have the right to feel scared, sad, angry, hopeless, happy, or anything else. Some kids easily verbalize their anxiety, while others take a little time to process before talking. Some will bottle up difficult emotions for extended periods of time. Respect your child's timeframe, while assuring them that all their feelings are valid and normal.

Find tactics and provide materials to assist those that release their feelings in non-verbal ways, possibly through music or various other art forms. Give yourself and your child some time to have a pity party, empathize with them, yourself and your partner. Teens and young adults are usually adept at seeing through our attempts to gloss over big feelings. Sometimes challenging events can be the perfect opportunity to start moving into a true adult-to-adult relationship with your teen. Oftentimes, we fear that admitting to them that we are also feeling anxious will cause them more worry, but it's important to let them know that we can feel scared and keep moving forward, doing our best. That is the definition of bravery.

- **Appreciation & Gratitude:** Find the ways you are in a better situation and have more privilege than others, including internationally. Perhaps it's the size of your house, running warm water and soap, a loving and safe family, financial security, high-speed internet, lots of devices. If we're fortunate in any of these ways, let's be sure we don't take it for granted.
- **Embrace Social Connection while Physical Distancing:** We're all going to be doing a LOT of screen time so focus on two types of *balance*:
 1. Balance between being on screens and off.
 2. Balance between how screens are being used. Watching videos, gaming, working together with others, creating stuff, communicating with others, and learning are all different (but sometimes overlapping) and important ways to be online.
- **Remember to Practice the Basic Needs to Be Happy, Daily:**
 - Play
 - Social connection/meaningful relationships
 - Being in service of something bigger than ourselves
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Focused attention and learning

Adapting and coming to terms with a new normal is never easy, at any age. Now is the time to help our kids concentrate on what is truly important – our health, family, happiness and well-being. All of the rest will get sorted out with time, cooperation, and kindness. Our greatest tools right now are connection, flexibility and problem solving (in that order). Let's stick together and remember that we're not alone.

Be Well and Take Care,

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