When the Novelty and Stress are Gone
the Stories will Remain

As we all know, our society is in the midst of intense stress, yet we seem to be doing some things that exacerbate rather than mitigate those feelings. What can we as teachers do to help? Let’s take care of ourselves and those we interact with while speaking a voice of calm and hope.

CENTER ON WHAT MATTERS

Frontload socio-emotional learning and mental health for your children, your families, and yourself.

During times of uncertainty, mental health experts share that the 3 R’s children may need most fall under headings like reassurance, routine, and relationship. As teachers, we can help parents understand that they are educating their children and promoting resilience when they help them identify and talk about emotions, when they show them deep breathing exercises and mindful movement activities, and when they stop for a few minutes to read books together, enjoy small moments and engage in meaningful conversation.

We can also work from an understanding that parents have been thrust into homeschooling with no preparation. The sudden fear that they may fail their children is a hovering cloud over many households with students under the age of 18. When making suggestions for home activities, let’s provide opportunities for parents to talk with and listen to their kids in relaxed ways rather than simply giving one more academic lesson or requiring one more uploaded assignment. Why? In times of anxiety, healthy relationships provide the buffer that keeps tolerable stress from becoming toxic.

Finally, remember that despite our best efforts, there is really nothing we as teachers can send home or assign that will be the same as the education students would have received in the classroom. Do your best and acknowledge that it is the best you have to give. Reach out for help when you need it and engage in self-care, but don’t feel guilty about it!

Suggest activities that promote imagination, play, creative thinking and problem-solving. If less is more when it comes to materials, ideas may translate more easily into take-home packets or text message suggestions for families with limited access to technology.

Call it project-based learning and schedule it for the afternoon, then encourage play-based, open-ended activities such as staging a puppet show, creating patterns or art from “loose parts” found around the house or outside, or using blankets, boxes and other found materials to build an imaginary land. Share simple possibilities that encourage families to imagine, play, problem-solve, explore and laugh together.

Use conversation and the sharing of stories to create connectedness while we are apart. Lead with respect, kindness and grace.

Remember that we’re all in this together and experiencing many of the same emotions and fears. Consider the perspectives of those around you and assume that they are doing the best they can in the current situation. If you as a teacher are encouraged to connect with your students on a regular basis, create opportunities to spend time listening to them rather than feeling that you need to present academic content at all times. Let them tell you a story... their story...and write it down. Encourage parents to do the same at home.

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

School Literacy and Culture will be here collecting resources and sharing activities that promote mental health while fostering problem solving and creativity. Reach out to let us know how we can help you. Contact Sharon (Sharon.dworaczyk@rice.edu) to talk about ways to support preschool to second graders or Pansy (pansy.gee@rice.edu) to connect around issues and ideas for third to fifth graders.