

Guidance to help our students cope with stress during the spread of the coronavirus

Dear parents of Friends School students,

In light of the current situation, and with our government declaring a state of emergency to limit the spread of the coronavirus, we, the counseling department, have decided to send this advisory letter and we hope that everyone will stay safe. We would like to share with you some guidelines for the psychological wellbeing of our students and provide them with ongoing health advice to cope with the changes happening around them, such as school closure, limited mobility and gatherings and exposure to fear and anxiety in the people around them.

Children of different ages all around the world are faced with shocking situations and painful experiences due to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and storms, or conflicts and wars, or sudden loss of a parent or being infected with incurable diseases. These lead to various psychological disorders such as fear, anxiety, and depression, which affect their performance, behavior, activity, discipline, self-esteem and their relationships with others as well as their view of society, all of which hinder their path to future growth.

Definition of crisis

A series of traumatic, painful, and unexpected events that have profound physical and psychological effects on children, resulting in behavioral, cognitive and emotional disturbances. These effects of a crisis are not considered a mental or psychological disease, but rather temporary and specific symptoms that can be overcome. After the crisis is over, children usually return to their previous emotional state.

Crisis characteristics: Confusion, turmoil and loss of balance that require new, innovative, non-traditional, sudden and violent methods of intervention.

★ **The psychological effects of the current situation (facing the coronavirus):**

Feelings such as anxiety, overwhelmedness, guilt, loneliness, helplessness, excessive attachment, sadness, hypersensitivity, panic, agitation, unwillingness to play, excessive sensitivity to certain sounds, difficulty remembering, disturbing dreams, irrational thoughts, hallucinations, frustration, self-loathing, the tendency to cry easily, difficulty concentrating, inability to verbally express feelings of pain and suffering.

★ **The physical effects of the current situation (facing the coronavirus):**

Loss of appetite, overeating, fast heart rate, change of sleep patterns, excessive alertness, fatigue, lethargy, headache, feeling of dizziness or suffocation, difficulty breathing, sweating, headache, stomachache and weight loss.

★ **The familial effects of the current situation (facing the coronavirus):**

Dysfunctional families, isolation of individuals, and parents preventing their children from going out.

How to deal with children if a family member is ill or quarantined:

- Provide children with information in a reassuring manner about the reason for the absence of a family member.
- Give them the chance to express their feelings and fears, and allow them to ask questions and share what is on their minds.
- In the case of separation (for example, if a family member enters the hospital or quarantine), constant phone contact should be maintained.
- Provide clear information on how to reduce their risk of developing the disease using age-appropriate words.
- Try to keep children close to their parents and family.
- Give children more love and attention in these difficult times.
- Make time for play and relaxation.

The role of the family in facing the current situation (facing the coronavirus):

- Monitor children's behavior.
- Encourage children to talk about the current situation, their fears and their thoughts.
- Help children understand what is going on around them.
- Answer the children's questions honestly.
- Make children feel appreciated and accepted.
- Encourage children to express themselves through drawing.
- Educate children on some guidelines that help alleviate the situation.
- Join your children in performing fun, simple and enjoyable activities.
- Encourage children to read and finish the assignments sent by teachers.
- Share your feelings with your children and that you feel anxious just like them.
- Emphasize that this is a temporary crisis and that we will overcome it together.
- Reduce children's exposure to the media.
- Inform the school counselor if the situation worsens.

We hope our students and their families safely overcome this crisis, and that they make the best use of their time. In case of any inquiries do not hesitate to contact us.

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