

Trauma-Informed Leadership

Rising to the Challenge: Staying Connected with All of Our Students

Appendix C: Self-Care Interventions for Students and Their Families

**J. Kevin Cameron
Dr. Marleen Wong
Patrick G. Rivard**

**APRIL
2020**



**NORTH AMERICAN CENTER™
FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT
AND TRAUMA RESPONSE**

Appendix C:

Self-Care Interventions for Students and Their Families

By Dr. Marleen Wong

The normal stresses of life before the pandemic required attention to the issue of self-care. How do these change during the pandemic stay at home orders?

To review, some of the domains of self-care are the following:

- Physical
- Intellectual
- Environmental
- Emotional
- Financial
- Social
- Spiritual
- Occupational

In the face of 'stay at home' or quarantine conditions, the importance of self-care remains the same but the steps we take to ensure good self-care for ourselves, our students and their families may be quite different. Here are some ideas in each of the domains:

Physical: Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition.

At risk, during stay at home directives, is the reality that adults or children can become couch potatoes binge watching television, streaming videos, playing online games or locked into social media sites and apps.

- Build in regular exercise at least 30 minutes 3 times a week remains the standard.
- For PE Teachers, recording or assigning an online/YouTube exercise video can take the place of an in-person class.
- Dance videos or videos of alternative forms of health activities such as yoga, pilates or tai chi can meet the need for regular exercise. These exercises can be done in the home or in the backyard, patio or balcony.
- Regular times for sleeping and eating keep our health in check.

Intellectual: Recognizing the importance of creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.

- Online classes can help maintain the goals of education in the intellectual realm.
- Families limited to the confines of their homes---reading, reflection, building in time for regular brainstorming or non-judgmental (no right or wrong answers) discussion of ideas are ways to stimulate brains in a positive way. Reaching an agreement or consensus is not

important. What is important is that each person has the chance to express their opinions.

- Parents not used to such interactions can start with 15-minute periods after the family reads an article out loud, a chapter in a book or watches a movie together. Parents can formulate 3 or 4 questions about the movie to begin. For example:
 - If you had to pick 2 main characters in the movie or book, who would they be?
 - Did the town/places play a role? Could the story have been told anywhere else?
 - What did you like best about the movie/book
 - If you didn't like the movie/book, what was it that you hated or disliked?

Environmental: Maintaining good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.

- Keeping each room in the house organized is more important than ever because your home becomes the space for family living, work and school. Identify new tasks and roles for each family member to keep things orderly and clean.

Emotional: Developing skills and strategies to cope with stress. Approaching life challenges with optimism and hope.

- Take time at least once a week in the virtual classroom or as a family to identify challenges and changes that need to be made. Then give each family member a chance to talk about one or two things they are grateful for in their lives since the pandemic began.

Financial: Recognize the impact of financial worries.

- The financial challenges imposed by the pandemic are no one's fault. Be aware that anger and blame can be projected onto children and other family members.

Social: Finding ways to stay connected to others.

- People fare better when they have access to a well-defined support system. During each day, create a balance between spending time with others and preserving private time alone.

Spiritual: Finding meaning and purpose in the human experience.

- People may question their faith, e.g., "Why would God allow this to happen?" Our core beliefs can be challenged in times of personal crises and natural disasters. Stay in communication with faith and spiritual leaders for guidance.

Occupational: Getting personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work.

- Educators and students still have important roles to play as teachers and learners. It may be more challenging online but research has shown that distance learning can be effective when both parties make a commitment to the process. Many professional disciplines are delivering graduate level educational programs online.

How to Intervene in High Risk Circumstances

The fields of Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA™) and Crisis/Trauma Response are inseparably connected. As we move further into the pandemic there will be stress-related escalations in some students lives. Teachers and other school staff should be counseled to notify students and their parents/caregivers that they are required to “update” and “consult” with their administrative team on a regular basis. Teachers and staff need to be reminded (or notified) of the following:

- **Consult, Consult, Consult!** (If you are uncertain about an interaction you had with a student or family member or about what you saw or heard, Consult).
- School Administration with support from Psychologists, Social Workers, Counselors, and other helpers will determine appropriate actions to be taken when Teachers and other school staff report concerns (this does not preclude a duty to report suspected child abuse).
- Utilize the Site-Specific VTRA™ team (School) and the School District (Division) and Community VTRA™ Team.
- Most districts have trained VTRA™ personnel.
- Child Protective Services and Police are “essential services” and will always be available.
- School administration (especially the Principal) should be available to maintain contact with SOC's similar to the pattern of interactions that would have resulted in the regular school setting.
- School administration (especially the Principal) should consider making online announcements to start each day and other text-talk or online-virtual communications that parallel a regular school day. In other words, model keeping a routine. This should include playing the National Anthem, including good news items.
- In the end, parents/caregiver are responsible for their own actions. Teachers and school staff are providing supportive education during a pandemic and not family crisis intervention.

Remember: “The better the data, the better the assessment and the better the assessment the better the intervention”.

J. Kevin Cameron, M.Sc., R.S.W., B.C.E.T.S., B.C.S.C.R.

Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress

Diplomate, American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress

Executive Director, North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response