Partners for Healthy Lives

VIRTUAL SIGNS OF SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Angela Begres, MSW, LCSW

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Recognize virtual signs of mental health challenges

Strategies to address mental health concerns with youth and parents through a virtual environment

Tips on how to support youth's social emotional needs and mental well-being

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

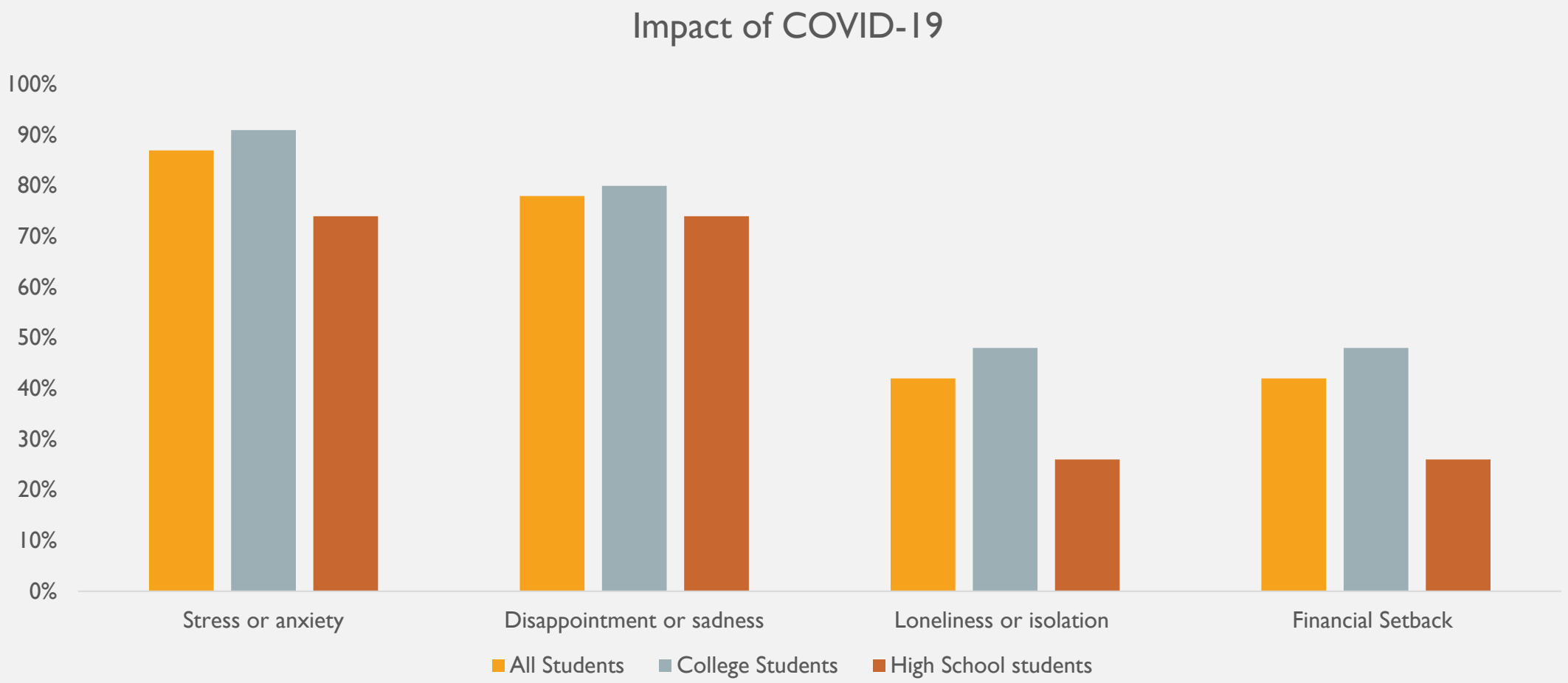
WISH

THE WEEKS GO BY, THE FOURTH, THE FIFTH,
AND NORMALCY'S BECOME A MYTH.
I WANT TO HUG, I WANT TO HOLD,
I WANT THIS DEADLY SCOURGE CONTROLLED.
I WANT TO WALK AMIDST A CROWD.
I WANT TO LIFT THIS MORBID SHROUD.
I SIT, SEQUESTERED IN MY HOME,
AND YEARN TO MINGLE, TRAVEL, ROAM.
MY ENERGY IS OUT OF WHACK —
I WANT MY NORMAL PROBLEMS BACK.

BY, ERIKA FINE
BROOKLINE, MASS.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

- A CDC report from August 2020 surveyed 5,400 people and found that 25% of respondents between the age of 18-24 had contemplated suicide in the previous 30 days.
- *Active Minds*, a nonprofit advocacy group supporting mental health education for students, has also reported some concerning statistics in 2020.
  - Their survey found that 80% of students have experienced some negative impact to their mental health due to the pandemic.
  - 20% say their mental health has significantly worsened.


Impact of COVID-19
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Stress or anxiety
Disappointment or sadness
Loneliness or isolation
Financial Setback
All Students
College Students
High School students

CHALLENGES

- **Change in routine:** Having to physically distance from friends, significant others, family, or worship community.
- **Break in continuity of learning:** The immediate need for virtual learning environments brought to light inequity in resources, access, and connectivity across families and communities. It could also have impeded continuity in adolescents' development of athletic or hands-on vocational skills, with potential impacts on their higher education and professional future.
- **Break in continuity of health care:** Parents and adolescents may have avoided seeking healthcare because of fear of getting sick with COVID-19.
- **Missing significant life events:** Social distancing and stay-at-home orders have affected young people's ability to gather with friends and family to celebrate or grieve in a typical way.
- **Loss of security and safety:** Along with stay-at-home orders during COVID-19, some adolescents may have been increasingly exposed to abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence at home, and/or sexual violence.

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

- Loneliness
- Depression
- Feeling disconnected

WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS

- Difficulty participating in class
- Poor attendance
- Frequently reporting illness
- Not completing assignments
- Withdrawal, such as:
  - Zoning out
  - Struggling with short term memory
- Arguing
- Refusing to work
- Communicating in verbally-aggressive ways
- Bickering with parents

MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WARNING SIGNS

Another place to take note of mental health changes is students' social media accounts.

Posts that directly state any intention to harm themselves or others obviously requires immediate attention.

Other red flags can be more subtle, such as statements about giving away things or about feeling hopeless.

SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA DURING COVID-19

- **Unwanted thoughts or images:** Replaying certain thoughts or images or having an increased incidence of nightmares.
- **Negative feelings:** Struggling with a range of negative feelings including: sadness, hopelessness, irritability and anger, or numbness.
- **Avoidance or needing reminders, problems with attention:** Becoming agitated or distressed if unable to avoid, people, places, and things that remind them of what happened. Youth may also have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or other activities, seem more forgetful, or seem like they are daydreaming.
- **Arousal and reactivity symptoms:** Startling more easily or feeling like there is a danger or threat present. Youth might manifest these symptoms physically, experiencing an increase in stomachaches, headaches, or other bodily aches and complaints, or by having a change in appetite. They may also have difficulty falling or staying asleep.

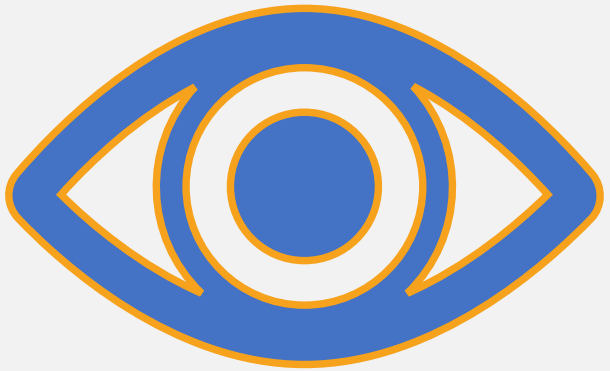
SUPPORT YOUTH VIRTUALLY

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Trust your instincts
- Use the standard metrics
- Be intentional
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Assume good will

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO BODY LANGUAGE

- **Body Language:** Are they slouching? Are they agitated? Do they seem low-energy? Do they seem high-energy? Are they able to make eye contact?
- **Ability to focus:** Can they maintain their focus for an entire class period, or for the duration of the videoconference/virtual class?
- **Vocal tone and speech patterns:** Allowing for the fact that voices may sound different online, do you detect any changes in the way your students communicate? Does a previously animated talker now have a flat affect? Does a previously quiet student talk a mile a minute?



WHAT IS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, LEARNING?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), defines SEL as:

- The process in which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy to others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- CASELs framework identifies five core competencies:
  1. Self-awareness
  2. Self-management
  3. Social awareness
  4. Relationship skills
  5. Responsible decision-making.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Discuss shared experiences around grief and loss that comes from living through a pandemic.

Give opportunities to practice resiliency and adaptability.

Help maintain connectedness by maintaining a sense of community.

CONNECTING SEL

General questions to ask:

- *How is everyone feeling?*
- *Is there anything on your mind?*
- *What emotions are you experiencing right now?*
- *Is anyone stressed out over COVID-19?*
- *How about your siblings and parents? Are they stressed?*
- *What can you do to make the day better?*

Specific questions to ask:

- *I noticed you haven't been turning in your assignments on time. Do you need more time with them? Is there anything going on I need to know about?*
- *You seem more quiet than usual. Did you notice that? Is something bothering you?*
- *You're more talkative than I've ever seen you. Did you notice that? Are you excited about something?*

#1 WAY PARENTS CAN SUPPORT YOUTH IS SIMPLY BY SPENDING TIME TOGETHER

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

STEPS TO HELP PROVIDE STABILITY AND SUPPORT TO ADOLESCENTS

- More attention
- Maintain a normal routine
- Talk, listen, and encourage expression
- Give honest and accurate information
- Teach simple steps to stay healthy
- Be alert for any change in behavior
- Reassure adolescents about their safety

HELPING YOUTH COPE

- Telehealth, school counselor, support groups
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Calm down music
- Well-balanced diet
- Limit caffeine
- 4,4,3,2,1, Technique
- Promote healthy sleep
- Positive self-affirmations

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

MANAGE YOUR CHILD'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL FEARS

- Develop a routine or schedule. Even just a few repeated actions, like going to bed at a regular time, can have a calming effect.
- Make sure your child is getting plenty of rest and maintains a well-balanced diet.
- Encourage your child to express their fears or worries with you. Continue to remind your child that it is normal to have concerns.
- Avoid giving your child reassurance (i.e. "Don't worry about it so much! Everything will be just fine!"). Instead, encourage your child to problem-solve and make a plan to act on specific fears.
- Role-play different scenarios with your child so he/she will know how to respond when placed in uncomfortable situations.
- Focus on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative thoughts/feelings. Try to replace negative emotions with something positive.

RESOURCES

- **Substance Abuse Treatment:** Findtreatment.gov
- **National Helpline:** Visit https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline/ or call 1800-662-Help (4357)
  - Treatment, referral, and information 24/7
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/ or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Crisis Text Line:** Visit www.crisistextline.org/ or Text "START" to 741-741
- **National Eating Disorder Association:** Visit www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/ or call 1-800-931-2237
- **Partners for Healthy Lives:** Virtual Signs of Serious Mental Health Problems

QUESTIONS

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