



Transcript:

The Impact of Mental Health on Students & Youth Part 3: Youth, Social Distancing, and Anxiety in the Time of COVID-19

Presenter: Angela Begres
Recorded on February 22, 2021

PRESENTER: Hello, everyone. And welcome. We're just going to give people a minute or so to get settled in and logged in. And we will start at 30 minutes after whichever hour you are based in.

Hello. And again, welcome to our webinar this morning-- Youth, Social Distancing, and Anxiety in the time of COVID-19. Our speaker today is Angela Begres. This webinar today is brought to you by the Great Lakes MHTTC and SAMHSA. The Great Lakes ATTC, MHTTC, and PTTC are funded by SAMHSA under the following cooperative agreements.

The opinions expressed in this webinar today are the views of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DHHS or SAMHSA. The Great Lakes MHTTC believes that words matter. The MHTC network uses affirming, respectful, and recovery-oriented language in all activities.

We have a couple of housekeeping details for you today. If you are having technical issues, please individually message Stephanie Behlman in the chat section at the bottom of your screen, and she'll be happy to help you. If you have questions for the speaker, please put them in the Q&A section, also at the bottom of your screen, and the speaker will respond to those questions. Please make sure that you put them in the Q&A because sometimes if they go in the chat, they may get lost. And we want to make sure that we address them.

You will be directed to a link at the end of the presentation today for a very short survey. We would really appreciate it if you could fill it out. It takes about three minutes, and it's how we report back to SAMSHA. A recording of this webinar, along with the slides and any materials, will be available on our website. That usually takes us about a week. And certificates of attendance will also be sent out to all who attend the full session. Those will be sent to you via email. And they usually also take about a week.

If you are interested in seeing what else we're doing, you may feel free to follow us on social media using the following links. And our presenter today, again, is Angela Begres. Angela is a licensed clinical social worker who did her training at the University of Chicago, where she obtained her MSW. She's an experienced trainer and presenter contracted both independently and through various nonprofits in the Chicago area, Michigan, and other areas. She has experience integrating mental health education programs into curriculum for students and staff within the Chicago and West Cook County Public schools. Welcome, Angela. And we're happy to have you back.



ANGELA BEGRES: OK. Sorry, I lost you for a minute. All right. Well, hello, everyone. And thank you all for attending today. As many of you may know, my name is Angela Begres. I am a licensed clinical social worker. I founded Partners for Healthy Lives. And when I'm not doing presentations, I'm also providing therapy through a private practice. Right now, I'm located in Michigan. My home is Ann Arbor. So welcome, and thank you all for being here today.

So today, we're going to learn a lot about stress and anxiety. We're going to explore the differences between stress and anxiety as well as talk about how anxiety affects the body. It's important to remember that anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience. And there's actually some benefits of anxiety. And we'll be discussing a little bit of those later on today.

I'm also going to talk about the impact of COVID-19 to feelings of isolation and anxiety. And then, as usual, I'll end the presentation by talking about different strategies that we can utilize to support youth.

But before we get started, I want to focus on you. I want you all to take a few minutes to really be present and stay here with us. So I want to think about, and I want you to think about your self care. What are some feelings that you're experiencing right now? What are some of your thoughts? And I want you to just take a couple of breaths and let go of all of those things that you have on your to-do list for a little bit. And try to really be present here with us today.

So it's important for you to take care of yourself. And as you all probably have heard before, we want to be able to check in on ourselves before we check in on others. Think about what are some practices that you do for yourself? How do you calm? What are your calming strategies? What are some of your self-help strategies? How do you practice self-help? Think about are you sleeping eight hours a day? Are you exercising? Are you stressing? We spend so much of our time recently sitting down, that at the end of the day, it's really helpful to stretch. Are you eating? Taking breaks? Think about who are you connecting with? Who are you talking to? How are you sharing some of your feelings?

And lastly, it's really important to remember breathing. It sounds easier said than done. But breathing is really important because when we breathe, we're cycling the oxygen in our brain. And we're oxygenating our brain with fresh air, so it helps take away a lot of the negative oxygen in there. So breathing is really, really important.

So let's take a minute to notice. When you're stressed, what is your self talk? What are some of the things that you say to yourself? For me, sometimes when I'm anxious or stressed, I start to think of the worst-case scenario. I'm never going to get that done. Too many things in my list. I am so exhausted. Is this ever going to end? All of my thoughts that come after I feel really stressed tend to be really negative. So think about what is your self talk? What stories do you tell yourself? And then it can be really helpful to take some minutes, some time to reflect on one, what is within your control and what's now within your control. And then how do we reframe our thoughts, our self talk to be more positive?



I have started to notice around me how we talk to ourselves. And oftentimes, the way we talk to ourselves is so negative. We make a mistake, and instead of saying, that's OK. We all make mistakes. We tell ourselves, we're so dumb. That was a stupid mistake. So we tend to talk to ourselves in a very negative way that we oftentimes wouldn't practice if we were talking to someone we care about.

So think about self talk. And I encourage you to start to practice more positive self talk. Give yourself permission to make mistakes. Give yourself permission not to finish all your to-do list. Give yourself permission to take a break or to do some self care. Maybe that means taking a longer shower. Maybe that means sitting down and starting the book that you've really wanted to read for a long time.

So I want to start with you first because in order for us to be able to support the youth in our lives, we want to be able to feel safe and healthy ourselves. And although that's hard at this time, and maybe many of us are struggling, it's important to at least find support for ourselves as well, just like we would suggest for the youth in our lives to also have support.

So let's think about what are some helpful strategies that you have used to manage your anxiety during this time? And I'm going to encourage you to write those in the chat box. And some of your strategies can help another community member here. So what are some things that you have been doing to manage your anxiety? I know for me, I have read so many books-- more than I've ever read in my life. So reading has really been a helpful strategy for me.

Cleaning, that's good. Exercise, absolutely. Yoga and exercise, reading, doing-- yeah, absolutely. Really awesome. So the good thing about sharing some of this information in the chat box is that we get to save the chat for ourselves. We get to save it and keep it in our text up, so it could be really helpful to go back and look through some of these strategies and maybe highlight some of them and try a new strategy, try a new way of practicing self care. And that can be really helpful. And you can even motivate you during these hard times.

So let's talk a little bit about stress. We know that stress is something that we all live with. Stress probably is something that we all have been experiencing a lot lately. So what is stress? Stress is anything a person perceives to be a threat. The term perception can vary widely from person to person. And stress is an external threat, such as a mountain lion standing in your path.

Stress is also the body's reaction to an external threat. Once the threat goes away, stress should go away. So it's really important to understand that when we think about stress, stress is different than anxiety because stress is external. And what we know stress is that once the threat goes away, the stress gets better. So for example, with youth, we know that a lot of youth experience stress around testing. Typically, that stress goes away when the past is over.

When we think about anxiety, that means anxiety is different because even after the test is done, that fear and worry about the test continues. So the difference between stress and anxiety-- and what's helpful to understand is that when we think about feeling really stressed, it's something that should go



away once the event goes away. As opposed to anxiety-- anxiety, oftentimes, the feeling of worry and fear continues even after the threat goes away.

So are youth experiencing stress currently? Absolutely. Are we all experiencing stress? Absolutely. Some things that we want to keep in mind, some of the things that we want to notice with youth when it comes to stress is, are we noticing change in sleeping or eating patterns? Are we noticing increased aches and pains? And we noticing increased focus in their body? Are increasing youth having a difficult time separating? Are we noticing youth withdrawing?

Now these same symptoms go with anxiety. But anxiety has a lot of other symptoms that might be more concerning and more impactful for youth. It's also helpful when we are trying to assess stress with you is noticing, do the symptoms go away? Or do they get better after the situation passes?

So let's say, a youth has a presentation, and they're feeling some of these.

Like, when we have a big presentation, we may be a little anxious and worried. And we may not sleep well that night. So are those symptoms going away after the event goes away? That's something to keep in mind as well.

So again, stress is transitory. It should go away once the event goes away.

Now let's explore what is anxiety. So when we think about anxiety, everyone experiences feelings of anxiety from time to time. Anxiety can be described as a sense of uneasiness, nervousness, worry, fear, or dread of what's about to happen or what might happen. While fear is emotions we feel in the presence of threat, anxiety is a sense of anticipated danger, trouble, or threat.

Anxiety tends to kick our brain's reaction or fight or flight. So it's OK to feel anxiety sometimes. Anxiety is a natural emotion because it has served a purpose for us for many years through many decades, right? When we are scared, we go into fight or flight. How do we protect ourselves? How do we maintain? How do we stay alive? So anxiety has maintained in our systems because it has served a purpose.

However, when anxiety becomes a disorder is when it starts to interfere. So an anxiety disorder is a mental health condition that involves excessive amounts of anxiety, fear, and nervousness, worry, or dread. So I think it's really important to understand the difference between feelings of anxiety and then an anxiety disorder. When we think about anxiety disorders, we think about those excessive amounts of anxiety, fear, nervousness, worry, or dread.

Anxiety that is too constant or too intense can cause a person to feel preoccupied, distracted, tense, and always on alert. The impact of anxiety disorders in our brain is that it prevents us from functioning. Our brain is kicking all of its signals out to our fight-or-flight response, and it's not allowing a lot of those signals to go to other aspects of its brain, such as critical thinking. So then you see young people who are having a hard time concentrating. So it can be really impactful if those symptoms persist for a long period of time. If they last a long period of time, anxiety can be really impactful.

So here are some stats. According to the National Institute of Health, nearly 1 in 3 of all adolescents ages 13 to 18 will experience an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders are very common. In fact, some data indicate that the onset



of anxiety disorders are around 11 years of age. And preliminary data from Penn State teen anxiety study reinforces a pattern of growing anxiety. So they compared pre-COVID-19 anxiety severity among respondents. And their results show an increase of anxiety symptoms-- up to 29%.

A lot of those symptoms were heightened with generalized anxiety disorder and school anxiety. So what we're noticing and what some research is starting to show us around COVID-19 is that young people are experiencing more symptoms of anxiety. Young people who actually had a disorder before COVID-19, their anxiety disorder has intensified. And a lot of young people are experiencing symptoms associated with generalized anxiety disorder and school anxiety, which we think about it-- it makes sense, right? Currently, there's a lot of fear and uncertainty around that pandemic.

What does the next year look like? And also, a lot of fear and uncertainty around school-- how is school going to look like this year? How is it going to finish this year? What is it going to look like next year? How am I going to attend college? Should I start looking for a place to rent? Should I stay home? So it's a lot of uncertainty and fear around that which correlates with the increase of anxiety.

Well, there are different types of anxiety disorder. And one thing I want to highlight here is that the goal of this course is not to teach you how to diagnose any of these disorders. I'm giving you general definitions of what each disorder looks like. And I'm going to also talk a little bit about what are some symptoms that you may be able to notice with the youth that you work with or that you know.

So oftentimes, the most common type of anxiety disorder and the most impactful is generalized anxiety disorder. So this is excessive worry about a variety of things, such as grades, family, issues, relationships with peers, and performance in sports. So generalized anxiety really is excessive worry about many things-- not one thing specifically.

Another type of anxiety disorder is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder also known as OCD. And this involves unwanted and intrusive thoughts, which are defined as obsessions, and feeling compelled to repeatedly perform rituals or routines, which are defined as compulsions, to try to ease the anxiety.

Now there's so much misconception about OCD. And we oftentimes throw out the term OCD for many different things, which, I think, sometimes stigmatizes this disorder in generalizes it. OCD can be really impactful for people who actually are diagnosed with it because their obsessions and compulsions severely impact their daily lives. So it's not about I like to keep my desk organized, and I am very careful in how I organize it. It's more of my desk needs to be organized in this way because if I don't do it this way, then something really bad is going to happen. And it could get really extreme. It can be something like someone's going to die. Or I'm going to die. So it's a little bit more severe than just needing to have something a certain way.

What we have noticed and what research is starting to show around COVID-19 is that for youth who already had symptoms or had tendencies for OCD, that those have intensified. So we're noticing youth doing things like excessive handwashing. We're noticing youth being really mindful with what they touch, being almost like obsessive about not being around people who



are coughing. So although it could serve a purpose because it keeps you safe, sometimes that compulsion is if I don't do this, then something really bad's going to happen. So we need to be really mindful of these things. Another type of anxiety disorder is social phobia also known as social anxiety. And this is also common with youth. And actually, you tend to see social anxiety in younger youth. And this is an intense fear of social and performance situations and activities, such as being called on in class or starting a conversation with peers.

One thing I will say about social anxiety-- I personally think that we all are going to be experiencing a lot of social anxiety once the pandemic is over because we have been socially isolating for so long that part of us have forgotten what it feels like to start conversations, how to engage with people in person. So be mindful of these things. We don't want to pathologize typical behaviors that will come post-COVID-19 as a mental health disorder.

What we do know is that youth are experiencing social anxiety. And sometimes, social anxiety can correlate with test anxiety or school refusal-- so this intense fear of now wanting to go to school, which oftentimes is seen in youth. So they would start to complain about feeling sick. They might really have a really big tantrum when you leave them at school. They might do everything they can to stay home. Or once they get to school, they call home to get taken back home. So just being mindful of some of those behaviors because that can be associated with social phobia or social anxiety.

Another disorder is panic disorders. Panic disorder is diagnosed if a youth suffers at least two unexpected panic or anxiety attacks-- now we'll talk a little bit about the symptoms of panic attacks in a little bit-- which means they come on suddenly and for no reason followed by at least one month of concern over having another attack, losing control, or going crazy. Panic attacks can be really scary because it is an intense level of anxiety that comes up suddenly for no reason and sometimes can include very strong feelings, like feeling like you're losing control, feeling like you're going to die, or feeling of going crazy. I do think it's important to know that one in four people will experience a panic attack at some point in their lives, and that does not mean the person has a panic disorder. So that's important to remember that. Sometimes, we will feel those feelings, and it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a disorder.

Lastly, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, also known as PTSD-- intense fear and anxiety, become emotionally numb or easily irritable, or avoid places people or activities after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic or life-threatening event. I was just recently reading about how news and social media are really increasing trauma for youth, especially during the past couple of months, when there has been so much news around not only COVID-19 but presidency and social justice. And so we have to be really mindful on how much screen time our youth are taking and also, what purpose is it serving for them? How are they finding purpose in that news? So that we can help prevent post-traumatic stress disorder during this time.

So I want to talk a little bit about how anxiety affects the body. And I think one of the most important things to know is that anxiety has physical changes in our body. It's not only emotional. It's not only social. But there are some physical changes or physical symptoms. So youth may complain of frequent



headaches, including migraine. They might be GI problems. So you probably have heard of this, right? Like, before a presentation or very anxious activity you had, your stomach starts hurting, right?

So there are some GI problems. Oftentimes, youth will go to a nurse's office because their stomach is hurting. And it could be associated to anxiety.

Unexplained aches and pains, excessive fatigue-- so feeling very tired-- and sleep disturbance. I am sure all of you probably are familiar with this but the amount of sleep disturbance that we're all having currently is very high. And I, in my practice, of seeing a lot of sleep disturbance with youth.

So be mindful and aware of these and checking in with you if you're noticing that maybe they appear tired more frequently than not. Asking them, how are you sleeping, can be a really good indicator to how their mental health is doing.

There's also changes in emotion-- so feeling on edge, right? That may mean that even the smallest things can make us upset or trigger a lot of emotions right-- irritability, difficulty concentrating. There's many-- oh, sorry-- there's many reasons why young people are having a hard time concentrating, and anxiety could be one of them. But please know that difficulty concentrating can be something that's happening generally because the way that young people are learning currently. It's not the most effective way for them to be able to be present and actively engaged.

Young people might also be feeling restless. When is this going to be over? When am I going to be able to play with my friends again? When can I stop wearing a mask? When can I go visit my family members? So there is a lot of restlessness and oftentimes, associated with anxiety. And unexplained outbursts-- so maybe all of a sudden, youth are acting out a little bit more. Maybe they are getting into more arguments with their siblings or their parents. So let's be mindful of that and understand that maybe some of this is associated with some feelings of anxiety. And our role should be really to empathize and be compassionate towards them as opposed to try to focus only on discipline.

There's some social changes as well. So all anxieties are about avoidance. So when we notice that young people are avoiding things that they enjoy, it is a cause for concern. So when we see young people avoiding social interactions with mutual friends-- I know that we all are avoiding those-- but even virtually, right? We notice young people not wanting to engage in virtual activities with their friends. We notice that young people, even with the small groups that they used to interact with are no longer interested in doing that. That should be a concern.

Avoiding any extracurricular activities that are available for them. I know that in many places, we are now starting to do some extracurricular activities. Things like swimming. are things that people are starting to practice a little bit more. There's other activities that are happening. So if young people are starting to withdraw from that or avoiding that, it's worth exploring.

Isolating from peer groups and spending increased time alone. So is the young person spending a lot of time in their bedroom? Are you noticing them interacting with their parents, with their siblings, with others around them? So making sure that young people are still engaged and interacting is really



important because that avoidance of those behaviors can be a warning sign for anxiety.

And as usual, poor school performance-- so if we notice a significant drop in grades, frequent missed assignments, describes feeling overwhelmed by workload and procrastination. So again we have to be mindful and remember that every youth is individual. So young people might be experiencing some of this because of the situation, and that might not necessarily be a sign for concern specifically. But when we see a lot of these symptoms together, that's when we should be concerned. That's when we should be tagging in maybe a professional and getting some more support for that young person.

I also read that virtual school is really difficult. And there's been some studies that show that having a tutor or support for a couple of hours, a couple of days a week, can significantly impact your school performance. So talking to youth and thinking about what are-- brainstorming what are some strategies that we can implement to support you? It's also important. Remember that anxiety is an illness, but that it is manageable, and there is a lot of treatment for anxiety. So the biggest thing we want to be mindful is let's notice some of these warning signs.

Let's notice how it's affecting the youth. And if it's something that is really interfering with their ability to function, with their ability to do their schoolwork, with their ability to socialize and engage, then we want to make sure that we brainstorm what are some supports available that they can utilize. And please know that some schools are still struggling with finding support for youth. So what might be other supports in addition to school supports that you can utilize?

Now some would ask, what are some symptoms of panic attacks? The symptoms of a panic attack, which by the way, each attack are all different. But I'm just going to name some of them for you. So it's this concept of a rapid heartbeat, like your heart is almost pounding out of your chest, sweating and trembling, feeling dizzy, upset stomach, difficulty breathing, chest pain, and the feeling like you're dying or going crazy. Some young people even describe numbness, tingling in arms and legs, and derealization.

Now if you looked at this list, and just look at any of these symptoms, they might not be impactful. What happens with the panic disorder-- panic attack is that you feel almost all of these symptoms at once. So it can be very, very extreme. For some, it feels like a heart attack. For others, it feels like a reaction to-- like an allergic reaction. So if we notice a young person is showing any of these symptoms, it's really important to also check-- get physical help because it could be a physical concern-- so being mindful of that.

Another important aspect of panic attacks is that they're actually very-- they're short lived. They don't tend to last more than 10 minutes. So if we are trying to assist a young person who is having a panic attack, and we know that this is what they're experiencing, it can be helpful to be there with the person, let them know that they're safe, ask them if you can do anything for them.

Sometimes, it could be helpful to have them breathe. I wouldn't force that. I wouldn't say, please breathe. But maybe saying, would you like to take a couple of breaths with me? Would you like to sit down?



So being really mindful of that. What we suggest not doing is saying calm down or relax-- so being really mindful and how we talk to that person, letting them know that this is a panic attack, it's short-lived, and that they're safe. Those things can be really helpful in supporting a youth who's having a panic attack. Also important to know that when we get a panic attack, most of the time, there's not a specific reason. Almost think of a pressure pipe. When we're feeling a lot of feelings, at some point, it needs to be released. So sometimes, panic attack is just a release of having a lot of feelings for a long period of time.

So it might not be one specific thing that led to a panic attack. It can be multiple things over a period of time. So it's important not to focus on just what happened before the event but really trying to support you through that event and then finding tools to support them post the event-- so maybe letting them take a break, or maybe sitting down for a few minutes, maybe assessing if they need some support or if they need to talk to someone.

So I said earlier that anxiety is not always negative. And the reason why I think this is important is because we tend to put a lot of pressure on ourselves and on our youth about having disorders or things that can trigger a lot of symptoms and negative symptoms. So it's helpful for us to know why anxiety exists and how it could be helpful.

So although anxiety can have detrimental effects, it may not be entirely negative. Anxiety also creates healthy stress that can motivate people to fulfill tasks, accomplish goals, and achieve their best results. This type of anxiety is known as Eustress, or healthy stress, which can energize you and boost your motivation. Without stress, we may not have the ambition and drive we need to work towards a goal. When managed correctly, anxiety can be used to ramp up our performance.

So remember that anxiety can and could be very useful for us. It is a way to hold ourselves accountable for our goals and our tasks. And it can help us stay on task.

So for example, when a young person has a test, it's the anxiety to do well that forces them to study and prepare for that test. So the goal really is to maximize the benefits of anxiety without allowing it to fully interfere with all of our emotions. And that can be really difficult.

So we want to be able to learn what it looks like, but we also want to acknowledge that it can be useful and helpful, and we don't want to just take it all away because he serves a purpose for us. And right now, through COVID-19, through this pandemic, it's serving a purpose for us too, right? The feeling of anxiety and fear is forcing us to follow guidelines around COVID-19, to utilize masks, to practice distancing, to keeping our hands clean, right? So a lot of this anxiety is important and is useful for us.

So how to have a discussion with your teen about mood. Now if you're concerned, if you're worried about a young person, if you notice a lot of these symptoms with youth, it is really important to approach them and talk to them. Some research shows that the number one protective factor for youth is feeling close to at least one adult. And that makes a huge impact. Being noticed and noticing that they're not doing OK can be a protective factor. So I encourage you all, if you are concerned about a young person, if you're



concerned about a young person in your life, please reach out to them because you can make a huge impact for them.

So here's some things to consider. Choose the right time. Know how to pick your opportunities. Don't try to engage with them. Don't try to engage with them in a conversation immediately after an argument or disagreement or when they're in the middle of a fun task. So we want to make sure we choose the right time. I used to do a lot of parenting education. And we would say, sometimes the best time to talk to a young person is during a car ride because no one can get out of it, right? So think about when is a good time to talk about it. When is the youth usually in a good mood? Or when do they have some free time? Maybe after dinner, maybe right after they have breakfast. So choose the right time.

Stick to facts. You know you cannot know what is going on inside your teen's mind. Let them know specifically what behaviors you find concerning and ask if they have noticed those behaviors as well. So stick to the facts, right? What have you noticed with youth. Let them know what's going on.

Let them know what you have seen. And ask them if they've seen them as well. So a lot of those signs and symptoms I discussed earlier, right? Hey, I noticed that your grades are starting to go down a little bit. I've noticed that you have decided not to go to swimming practice for the last two weeks. So start by talking about what you've noticed. And maybe ask them, have you noticed that as well? It's also important to validate.

Let your teen know that you can see how hard things for them lately. Express that you care about them and their well-being. So this is hard. It's been a hard time for all of us. I'm here for you if you're ready. And know that we're all going through this. So validating their feelings is really important. Oftentimes, young people really don't receive a lot of validation. So I encourage you to do some validating of the young person's emotions, whether they're feeling stressed out because of school or feeling discouraged because of how long this pandemic has lasted, let's validate some of those feelings. And sometimes, just labeling the feelings can be really helpful.

Another thing that can be helpful where communicating with the youth is some self-disclosure. If you've ever experienced anxiety or know someone who has, sharing can be a powerful tool in this constant. So saying something like, I have been feeling some anxiety too during this time, and it's been really difficult for me to process those feelings. I oftentimes have to engage in some mindfulness activities to be present and help myself. Or I've been trying to use positive self-talk to redirect my thoughts. So it's helpful for young people to know that they're not alone in those feelings, that other people have felt the same way they felt.

And then be ready for push-back or not. Oftentimes, parents are reluctant to have this conversation because they're so concerned that he will go poorly. And it might. But you might be surprised to find that your child is thankful to have someone notice and validate their experience.

So don't be afraid for push-back. We know that that might happen. But sometimes, when we approach the young person, we should think about just saying, hey, I notice you. And I'm here for you if you're not ready to talk right now. We don't need to push a conversation. We can just open the door for the



young person to know that we're here to talk to them. It's also important to know that sometimes we're just not the right person to have this discussion with our teens.

I'll tell you, my mom, she's my very best friend. I love her so much. But she's probably not the best person to talk about anxiety with or my mood because she matches it. Like, if I tell her I'm really stressed, she's like, oh, my god. I've been so stressed too. So if you don't feel like you're the right person, then maybe connect the person to someone who is the right person.

So maybe as the mom, we're not the best person, but we can tell the father, hey, do you mind checking in with them? I feel like maybe they wouldn't be as open with me as they will be with you. Right. So acknowledging that we may not always be the right person is OK as long as we still connect that young person to someone.

We can also let that young person say, hey, I'm here to talk to you, and I'm here for you, and I'm willing to listen to you if you want to. But if you'd rather talk to someone else. I'm able to help you with that too.

So that also takes away the pressure. Remember that young people, their main thing is to be able to satisfy their parents. Their goal is not to let their parents down. And sometimes, they fear that if they let their parents know how bad they've been feeling, it can be disappointing. So it could be hurtful for you sometimes to talk to someone else, where they don't have the pressure of disappointing their parents.

And if you're a parent, you can even let the young person know, I won't be disappointed if you're feeling down, or if you're feeling depressed, or you're feeling anxious because we all are feeling some of this right now. So that goes along with validating some of those symptoms or just behaviors for them as well.

So I've said this already, but it is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, worry, during COVID-19 pandemic. I want to read this again because I think we should write this down somewhere and say it every day to ourselves. It is natural to feel stress, anxious, grief, and worry during the pandemic. In fact, I think we're entering the one-year mark of COVID-19. And I don't know about you all, but I've been listening to a lot of news around the impact of COVID-19, the loss around COVID-19, and it has me feeling like I need to cry every five minutes.

So let's remind ourselves that it is natural, that it's impacted us in many different ways, and that we want to be kind to ourselves and accept some of these feelings. We should not be pushing away some of these feelings because that increases anxiety. It increases stress. So practicing just some compassion to ourselves can be really, really helpful. And if we're feeling some of these feelings, let's sit with them. And if the youth in our lives are feeling some of these feelings, let them sit with them for a little bit. It's OK to sit with feelings. We don't always have to feel positive. Sometimes, we just feel negative. And that is OK.

So living during COVID-19-- the threat of a virus can trigger mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. We've talked about this already. It's also important to know that for those youth who already were at risk of developing anxiety or depression, it definitely triggered that for them as well.



This may lead to fear of being contaminated with a virus or obsessive-compulsive tendencies such as excessive handwashing.

So many youth, I know, are really scared of contracting COVID-19. They think of COVID-19 equals death, and there is a lot of fear around that. And in a minute, I'm going to talk about how do we support youth through that fear. Also, there's a little bit of research around the effects of loneliness. So a systematic review published by the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry examined the impact of social isolation and loneliness on mental health in children and adolescents. And their findings were very interesting. They found that duration rather than intensity of loneliness was more strongly associated with mental health symptoms. So that's an indicator for where we're at right now, right? We are experiencing loneliness now almost for a year.

Loneliness associated with both anxiety and depression-- and the most interesting finding here is that social isolation loneliness increase the risk of depression up to nine years. So this research suggests that loneliness for youth during the disease control measures of COVID-19 may affect the future mental health of youth. Now I think it's important-- and I think that there's a lot of other mental health professionals here-- that we already knew that mental health in youth was at a verge of crisis. A lot of youth have been experiencing mental health.

A lot of youth were struggling with symptoms of depression, anxiety. And now COVID-19 appears that might intensify a lot of those risks for mental health and youth. So we want to be mindful of that as professionals. They also recommend prevention supports and early intervention to address mental health needs of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. So I encourage you to think about what are some early interventions that we can provide for youth during the-- I know there's a lot of different programs available for schools. So if you have connections to school superintendents, to organizations that support youth, get involved. Think about how do we become creative in preventing the long-term effects of COVID-19 because as we are seeing, and as some data is starting to show, there is going to be a long-term effects of COVID-19 in youth mental health. So what does that look like for middle school? What does that look like? What does it look like for elementary? What does that look like for middle school? And what does it look like for a high school students? And how do we provide support for all of those different areas?

So there are some strategies to help youth's dysfunctional thinking pattern. What we know about anxiety is that it oftentimes leads to a dysfunctional thinking pattern. What that means is that we tend to become wary. We tend to feel fear about a certain situation. And then we spiral into it. We start thinking about all the worst-case scenarios that can happen through that situation. And that really is the way our thinking pattern happens when it comes to anxiety. So when it comes to COVID-19, there's certain things we want to think about and how do we support youth in some strategies that we can use with youth to support that thinking pattern. The first strategy is media distancing. So to stop the spread of COVID-19, we've had to practice social distancing. But to stop the spread of anxiety, we must distance ourselves from the media.



Again, the media includes, for youth, the media includes things like Tik Tok, and Instagram, and Facebook.

Can be helpful to talk to youth in your life and say, we understand that this is important for you and that in some ways, it helps you stay connected. But let's think about taking breaks from social media. And that is also for you as an adult. You probably have heard that watching news 24/7 has increased-- it has a high risk for feeling depression and anxiety for us.

So let's try not to watch the news all day long. Watch the news once a day. Maybe pick and choose the newspapers that you read, so you are now reading the same news in multiple places. So it's really important for us to practice some media distancing in order to support our mental health.

Do not engage with worry. Take action. You can stop thoughts from entering your mind, or you can choose to stop dwelling. And you can choose to take action to solve problems. There is a huge difference between worrying and problem solving. So when we are supporting youth, sometimes we can talk about what are some of the things that worry you right now? And then what are some of those things that you have control over?

Oftentimes, my therapy sessions are all around this. OK, what is within your control? And how can we problem solve that? And with youth, sometimes it's hard for them because of brain development. It's hard for them to understand that there are some things that they can control and that they can change.

And there are some other things that is fully out of their control. We cannot end COVID-19. That's outside of our control. But what are some things that we can do to feel safer within this pandemic?

Focus on the present, right? So focus on the present odds. All deaths are tragic. And the coronavirus can be deadly. But maintaining proper perspective can reduce your anxiety. No doubt, the symptoms of COVID-19 can be horrible. But most people infected with COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms or no symptoms at all. So we all read the news. And we all hear the media. And we know the impact that COVID-19 has had in our communities.

But we don't always get the news in the media around how many people who get COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms. So when we go into that spiral of this is deadly, this is terrible, this is very scary, come back to the present and remind yourself, it is dangerous. And it is horrible. But the majority of people who do get this illness have mild to moderate symptoms. So do we take precaution? Do we follow guidelines? Absolutely.

But if, by any chance, we do end up with a disorder, with that illness, we can't panic. We have to really think about the major odds. The odds are that most people who get COVID-19 will only get mild to moderate symptoms. We have to tell that to ourselves. And sometimes, we need to tell that also to youth, who are very terrified of contracting this illness.

And honestly, I oftentimes hear youth that only worried about themselves. Their answer to me is always like, I'm not worried about myself. I'll be OK. But I really worry about my mom and dad. So even letting them know that you will be OK, too, right? You all are taking all your precautions, and you're trying to stay safe. But if this does happen, it doesn't have to end in a tragic way.



Do not react to physical symptoms. This is something that we all have to practice. If you cough, it does not mean you have COVID-19. And the same is true for others who cough. So be mindful of that. I think we're all hyper aware currently about symptoms of COVID-19.

And that is the first thing we should rule out because that is the way we maintain safe. However, in our minds, it's important for us to remind our thinking pattern that if someone is coughing, it doesn't always necessarily mean COVID-19. And if you're coughing, it doesn't necessarily mean you have COVID-19 and you're going to die because that's oftentimes how our thought process works.

Focus on being productive. And maybe it could be helpful to find new ways to enjoy life. Although we have no control over this crisis, we must focus and where we do have control. So think about what are some things that the young person can learn? What are some new opportunities that they can try? And maybe, what are some things that you can try together?

So a lot of people have gotten into baking. A lot of people have gotten into drawing. People are starting to take online guitar lessons, online music lessons, online painting lessons. So COVID-19 has open states, right? Also, think about before COVID, right, your kids were all going to different things. One was going to soccer. One was going to basketball. One was going somewhere else. And now we're all home. So maybe, let's think of ways that we can positively build memories together in this time where we are all spending this time together. And I'm sure now you can think back to even the beginning of COVID-19 and what were some things that you enjoyed out of it, right? It gave you time to step back and notice that we don't have to be rushing through life-- rushing to get to one place rushing, to do all of these things. We all had to step by and just sit at home. And it helped us slow down. So thinking about how do we build new memories and learn new things can be a really helpful coping strategy through this time and even after that pandemic, right? How do we now start to practice new ways of doing things? And how do we slowly go back to some sense of normal?

Engage in stress-reduction activities. Focus on why you are grateful for, things like exercise your body and relax your mind. Those are all really helpful. Think about this as a routine. We know that mindfulness is best when we incorporate it into our daily routines. So maybe it is a great time for the young person to start incorporating a mindfulness activity in their daily routine. Maybe while they're brushing their teeth, maybe right before they start virtual school, maybe right as they're driving into school-- practicing some mindfulness.

Preserve some sense of normalcy. Maintain a structure to your day with some balance of normalcy will help reduce anxiety. I think I've talked about this before on how to manage COVID-19. We need to maintain a structure in our routine. And we need to do the same for youth. Youth thrive in structure. Even though youth tend to fight it, they thrive in it. So how do we maintain a structure for them? How do we keep a daily routine? And I think is starting to get better. I'm sure many of you have figured out how to do it. But if you are struggling with that, work on it. Work with the young person on it. Hey, you



know, I think we really want to start putting more structure into our day. Let's work through maybe a daily routine together. When is the best time?

When should we be waking up during the weekday? How long should you be spending in school work? When should you take breaks? Just think about how are you doing your day to day and if you need to be more structured, especially for youth, who have a hard time concentrating, putting some structure around that can be really helpful.

Be kind to yourself and others. Don't be hard on yourself. Reaching out to relatives and friends who are isolated or in need will boost their spirits and yours. So when we're feeling alone or having a hard time feeling connected, it can be really helpful to connect with others. That might be a Facetime call. That may be sending a letter. That may be calling someone. All those things can be really helpful.

And as usual, don't be afraid to seek out professional help. Professional help is available. It can make a huge difference. It can help with individuals who are feeling an increase in anxiety. I would always say that if you decide to seek professional help and someone doesn't work out for you, don't give up. Find someone else. But it's so important to get connected with someone and be able to talk to someone about your feelings. And, again, having an external source that has background on mental health disorders can make a significant impact on young people.

And young people want to talk. Oftentimes, we say, oh, they don't like to talk to anyone. No. Trust me. They actually really want to talk. So give them the space and ask them, would you rather talk-- would you like to talk to a professional? Sometimes, it's helpful to normalize it as well. We might say, like, you know, sometimes, when we're feeling sick, we go to a doctor to get our bodies checked. Sometimes, when we're feeling like our emotions are struggling, we talk to a mental health professional to make sure that we're taking care of our emotions. So it could be helpful to normalize that situation for them as well.

Other strategies for supporting youth-- discuss the situation at their level. I just gave you some examples. Let them know-- talk to them at their level. And sometimes, with high school students, their level might be similar to yours. So don't be afraid to talk to some high school students or adolescents in adult terms. Sometimes, they appreciate that.

Take your cues from them. If they're thriving, and they're doing good in school, and they are connecting with their peers and friends, that's a cue that they're doing OK, right? Social isolation doesn't impact everyone. Anxiety doesn't impact everyone. And we all handle anxiety differently.

So just because you took this course, doesn't mean that every youth in your life is experiencing anxiety or being impacted by isolation the same way. So take the cues from them. Notice how they're handling the different areas in their life. And if you notice that they are struggling, then we connect. Then we talk with them. Ask instead of assuming you know how they are feeling.

Sometimes, we're like, oh, you're so angry right now.

But instead of naming it for them, maybe ask them, how are you feeling? Maybe they're feeling sad. Maybe they're feeling lonely. So it's helpful to ask how young people are feeling. Or you could say something like, it sounds like



you're feeling really angry right now. Am I right? So all those ways are helpful ways and helping label emotions for young people, but also allowing them to label their own emotions. One thing I've recommended for people who work with younger youth is there's a lot of different handouts out there with emoji emotions, like happy, sad, disappointed, guilt.

Bring those out and put them in the refrigerator. And sometimes, if the young person's maybe having a tantrum or being really irritated, maybe it could be helpful to say, hey, can you point out to me what you're feeling right now? And that way, we start to help younger youth or younger kids learn how to define their feelings and their emotions. When we define our feelings and our emotions, it's easier to learn how to manage them. When we try to ignore them or push them away, they build up. So the more we can do to teach young people and adolescents to manage the emotions, the better it is. So labeling feelings can be really helpful.

It's also important to reassure youth with the facts. Let them know that the facts around your community. Like, here in our community, these are the numbers of COVID-19. Here in our community, this is what we're seeing around schools reopening. So really give them facts on what is going on around them because oftentimes, when we hear the news, we hear the United States news. And it could be really different depending on which state, community, area you're living in.

Discuss with them what you're doing and what they can do to stay safe. When we see young people starting to feel really overwhelmed, and anxious, and worried, it can be helpful to say, hey, let's take a minute and walk through the things we're doing to stay safe. Are these things helping you stay safe?

Do you think we should add other things in our tools to keep safety into our daily routine? So really discussing safety can be really helpful. This could also be helpful when we're starting to prepare youth to go back to school or even if we have a break. Sometimes, between breaks and going back to school there can be an increase of anxiety. So allowing you to revisit what we're doing maybe as a family, maybe as an individual to stay safe can provide some reassurance.

And plan activities to do together. Yeah, maybe we're seeing our kids 24/7. What else can I do with that? But think about what are some things that I can do specifically interact with them in a positive way. Maybe that is taking a painting class together. Maybe that is doing a YouTube yoga activity together once a week.

So what are some things that we can do? Maybe that means let's take some cupcakes. There's some things that we can do together that enhances satisfaction and enhances connectedness because we know that that's what youth are really struggling right now.

All right, so you probably all have heard of this word a lot recently-- resilience. We talked about young people being very resilient, and it's a term that we hear a lot. But I think it's a really important thing to be mindful of. We are all capable of being resilient. So resiliency is your ability to cope with and bounce back from stress and adversity and hopefully even grow through that experience. We all build resiliency through our past experiences, through our ups and downs.



I bet we can all think right now about a time in our lives that was really difficult. And when we think back to it, we think about how do we make it through. But thinking about what have worked in the past can be really helpful in building resiliency, right? So it can be helpful to tell young people, hey, remember that time that you didn't get into that sports that you wanted to, and you were really sad? Remember how you were able to overcome that? And then something-- then you got into swimming, and that was way better. So I just remember what has worked in the past. That can be really helpful in gaining resiliency. Another tool for building resiliency social support. And obviously, this one's difficult. But we want to get creative on how we provide positive peer relationships and supports for youth. So that might be finding ways to connect with other youth in a meaningful way. Maybe this involves joining a student group, an organization, or a team. Maybe that means trying to volunteer. There's a lot of different things that we can do, even virtually, to volunteer with others.

Another way that we can build social support is by practicing random acts of kindness. Maybe that means sending grandma a really nice card telling them that you miss them. We know that that's going to make their day better, and it also makes us feel better because we're doing something nice for someone else.

We also build resiliency through hope. Hope is the belief that your future can be better than your past and that you play a role in making it so. Hope is really, really important. Really, the only reason why we get through things is by finding hope. So how do we encourage hope in youth? Well, we help them think about goals for the future. Think about turning to faith, whatever faith that the youth might practice or that you practice as a family.

And again, practice kindness towards self and others. Hope is so crucial. And we know that hope has an impact on our mental health. So it's important for you to always assess what is the young person's goals for the future? What do they find hope in? For me, hope right now is spring. I am hoping that spring is coming along and the snow goes away. And that's really what's keeping me going-- hope for spring. So thinking about what is giving you hope is really important as well.

We also build resiliency for self care. So I ask you all, how are you taking care of yourself? Let's talk about youth. How are they taking care of themselves? Do they know what self care means? Do they understand what it looks like? Practicing things like self compassion, being kind to themselves, being kind with the words they use to talk to themselves, making time for quiet reflection-- maybe prayer, journaling, yoga, spending time in nature, or practicing gratitude.

There's something to be said about having a gratitude journal. Even a great idea is let's practice gratitude together at the end of the day. Sometimes with youth, I always ask them, what is something good from your day and maybe something that you learned from your day today? I call them grows and glows. Where is an area that you were able to glow today that you did really well and maybe an opportunity, an area of growth. And that helps them think about what they did really well today and maybe something that they want to change in the future.



And lastly, making meaning. Finding meaning is the act of making sense and exploring significance of an experience or situation. How we make meaning out of this moment in time is going to be important in moving forward. So I encourage you all to think about how you're making meaning of this time. And especially, talk to used about how they're making meaning of this time. I'm sure you can learn a lot about youth and how resilient they are by asking them how they're making meaning of this time.

So a question for all of you, how are you staying connected? How are you staying connected with your loved ones during this time? What are some things that you're doing to feel that you are socially connecting with others? If you can share some of those in the chat, that would be great. Oh, I like group test. That's great, yeah. Calling, yeah-- calling family. Yeah, really magnificent. Absolutely, these are all great. There are some games that you can do virtually with a family.

So thinking about even how do we get creative in staying connected with others. There are some apps that we can do to even watch TV with others virtually. So that can be another way that we can stay connected. So I encourage you to also think outside the box when you're working with youth and brainstorming things that they can do to stay connected. I see some really cool things. Kahoot it. See? I don't know what that is, but it sounds great.

Letters, cards-- absolutely.

All right. So as usual, when we think about anxiety, we need to talk about mindfulness because mindfulness is really, really important. Again, taking a minute to breathe is helpful. It changes the chemistry in our brain. Sometimes, mindfulness also is a way for us to come back to the present and stay there. When we experience anxiety, we tend to really be either in the past or in the future. We barely ever stay in the present. So mindfulness is a great skill for individuals who experience anxiety in general to stay here in the moment and in the present.

So here are some strategies. I've also included these strategies in my fact sheet that will be added here, and it will also be on the website. So things like tense and release. I like to do it a lot with youth. So that means we tense all of our body, and then we start releasing it. And we start with our toes, and then we move up in our body. And then we repeat the exercise maybe once or twice.

Belly breathing-- so feel it. Put one hand on your stomach and one on your chest and slowly breathe in from your stomach, and slowly breathe out.

Expand like a balloon, and then deflate. That's really helpful.

Another way that we can practice mindfulness is mindful meal. Pay attention to the smell, taste, and look of your food. And try not to multitask. How many young people are trying to eat and do school, eat and do their homework? So practicing mindful eating or mindful meals can be really helpful. It helps youth even regulate and help know when they feel full. So this can be helpful for youth as well.

Meditation-- that means sitting in a relaxed, comfortable position. Pick something to focus on, like your breath. When your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath. So meditation is that concept you sitting quiet with yourself and noticing your body.



And one that I really like is blowing bubbles. So when we blow bubbles, we're actually practicing a good way of breathing. We have to Inhale and exhale. So it helps us monitor our breaths. And then we can also notice it. Notice the colors that come out. Notice the shapes, the sizes. Really helpful and fun activity to do with kids.

I have to tell you all compassion is my favorite word. I love talking about compassion. I think that if we build a better and more compassionate world, we'll be in such a different space in time. So I want you all to really, really think about the concept of compassion. Compassion noticing others suffering and being motivated to provide relief to them. Fostering compassion is important because it helps us recognize that even in time of hardship, our common human response is not to show reckless disregard of others but to show compassion. There are three strategies that can help create youth capacity for compassion.

Show compassion to kids, so they can experience receiving it. So that's really, really important. How do we show compassion to kids? By listening to them. By letting them know that they're not alone. We want to be able to also show compassion to kids by being compassionate towards ourselves. How do we take care of ourselves? How we take care of ourselves is how we practice self compassion.

Teach kids to practice self compassion. So when we think about self compassion, that means how we take care of ourselves, how we talk to ourselves, how we treat ourselves. So teach them self compassion. So tell them that it's OK not to feel OK. It's OK to feel our emotions, that we all sometimes go through many different emotions, and that's our common humanity. There's days that we all feel great, and there's days that we don't. And the nice thing about that is that we all go through those days.

And encourage kids to extend compassion to others. That means doing different kinds of different compassionate acts, like sending letters to nursing homes, maybe volunteering for something that helps others feel connected, things like volunteer to read books talk to younger kids, volunteer to read books to the elderly, right?

There's so many ways in which we can share compassion. And by sharing compassion, it helps us feel that we're part of something and that we're not doing this alone. And that's why I think the word compassion is so important. I really want to live in a world where all young people are able to feel compassion but also are able to practice self compassion. Oh, went too far, sorry.

So thank you everyone for being here today. I really enjoyed talking to all of you. This is definitely a topic that I love. So I want to ask you all if you can just share in the chat what was one strategy that you learned today. And what will you take with you today that will help you after this meeting? So if you can you share one thing that resonated with you today, that would be really helpful. And think about what is one strategy that you will take with you. And I encourage you to practice that strategy moving forward. Don't just leave this information here. But take it with you and. And share it with yourself, with others, or with the youth that you know in your life.



Yeah, thank you. Teaching others about compassion-- absolutely. There's a lot of beautiful research and information around compassion out there. So I encourage you to learn more about it. All right, I see a lot of great stuff. Thank you all for sharing. Focus on hope-- absolutely. I think that's a good skill to bring with you. Yeah, self care.

So here's some helpful resources. I want you to remember that a crisis often offers opportunities. This pandemic has highlighted a need to focus on youth mental health. And we want to start there. So if you take anything from this is think about how can you get involved in advocating for youth mental health, in developing more programs for teen mental health and for youth mental health? Because we are going to need a lot of supports moving forward. And we need to have the supports in place for youth because you've heard this before about youth our future. So we need to spend time supporting them and preparing them for it.

Any questions? I will be happy to answer them. All of my references are listed on my PowerPoint here at the end, so feel free to go ahead and look through those references. The fact sheet that was attached to this also has some other specific articles and resources that you can refer back to if you want to learn more about this.

PRESENTER: Great. Thank you very much, Angela. This is, again, always been very helpful really great practical information. We do have about three questions. The first one is, is there a particular age group in middle school dealing with more anxiety?

ANGELA BEGRES: Actually, we are seeing a lot more anxiety in high school and college-age youth. And I think a lot of that comes because they have been very impacted with school activities. And for college students, we've seen that having colleges being closed or having to come back home or doing financial challenges are really impacting college students as well.

PRESENTER: Yes. What are signs that techniques used to address anxiety attacks are not effective and they need to be addressed in an ER visit or crisis intervention?

ANGELA BEGRES: So I think any time you notice a high increase of anxiety, like the panic attack, we should always, always address it by physical concerns. So my best suggestion is always get them medical treatment or seen by a medical professional as well.

PRESENTER: Great. Thank you. And then someone asked if they said that they're interested in learning a little bit more about derealism.

ANGELA BEGRES: Derealization? OK. In learning more about-- I'm not sure what they mean by that. I don't know if I know any resources for that at the moment.

PRESENTER: OK. Another question we have is any suggestions for trying to get support from school? Our concerns are not being responded to.

ANGELA BEGRES: Well, thank you for sharing that. Absolutely-- a lot of the information. I've gotten from a lot of people is that schools are really struggling. They're really struggling with having enough resources for all of the youth that are experiencing mental health challenges. So sometimes, we need to go outside of the school and try other mental health organizations, try



other professionals because we know that schools right now are almost overwhelmed by the need.

PRESENTER: Great. Thank you. We do not have any more questions in the Q&A section. So again, I just want to thank you for your fantastic presentation. Thank everyone for their time. The fourth part of this is March 8, so don't forget to register. It's on our website. And Stephanie put it in the chat. So you can go ahead and register and be able to see all four of these. Again, they will be available on our website with the PowerPoints and any handouts. So that usually takes us about a week. So you can check back in about a week on the website. And again, thank you everyone, and have a fantastic afternoon.