



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

Dr. Nancy Rappaport and Dr. Robert Brooks' Responses to Stress Relief Webinar April 3rd, 2020

I. Question and Answers:

Dr. Rappaport answers in red and Dr. Robert Brooks answers in blue.

- How beneficial is it for students to see their teachers' faces/hear voices?
Very beneficial to see faces and hands/hear voices not just lecture, better chance of keeping students. I am passing on some tips from an online coach – 1) Steady your eye contact, 2) Lower the screen so we see from an inch above your head down to your belly button - let us see your hands. I agree that it's helpful for the students to see/hear a teacher's face and voice. I think seeing the teachers (similar to people seeing us during the webinar) makes things more personal and will hold a student's attention longer than just hearing a voice.
- I like the idea of creating a day structure. How do you keep the schedule on-track - how to get kids to self-regulate and stay on-track?
The self-regulation is actually first co-regulation in that you are modeling connection and breathing say the three simple belly breaths before launching into didactics. Allowing time for stretch breaks. This will actually fortify staying on track. Also recognizing some students maybe pulled in different directions at home (their parents are needing to work and your student is in charge of their younger sibling so the demands for us to be flexible and understanding are even more paramount. We may lose some academic ground because this is an extraordinary circumstance and you are not failing your students by offering to be available even if they can't always take advantage of it. I would also add the following thought that ties to kids having an input into solutions. Parts of the schedule may be fixed, such as instruction time from a teacher. We should ask students for their input about scheduling activities that are not initially bound by formal instruction. When the schedule is set up, I would recommend a parent even saying the following (this idea is based in part on the work of psychologist Gabriele Oettingen who wrote the book *Rethinking Positive Thinking*): What do you think will help you remember the schedule? If you forget the schedule, how would you like me to remind you? I should note that many of the parents with whom I have worked love this last question. When a child tells a parent how he/she would like to be reminded and then the parent reminds the child in the way the child recommended, it is less likely to be seen as nagging.
- Thank you so much for everything you've shared today. Our school is currently discussing how to assess or grade remote learning work, recognizing that all families are experiencing this differently. You mentioned that the expectations have to be lowered, or changed. Do you have any suggestions for how to approach this?
I have heard a lot of schools going to pass fail recognizing there is so much variability in stability in home environments to perform and also being flexible with deadlines. We can only imagine the challenge say if a parent gets very sick and is unavailable and a child needs to move, or their parent is working long shifts in a convenience store etc so I think we should prioritize right now connection and support and the evaluation of what they learn gets shrunk. I agree with Nancy. I think the best solution is what a number of schools (hopefully, many) are going to do, namely, a Pass-Fail system. I think given the reasons Nancy mentioned, it truly is not fair to give letter grades. Doing so will just place more pressure on kids and their teachers and parents.

- What advice can you give to working parents? How can we help our younger children get through the social isolation? Kids are very social, and this has been very tough.
Bob I will let you think about this one. We certainly have to empathize with kids about social isolation. I think older kids will more easily understand and cope with social isolation via social media, Facetime, etc. One technique I would use with younger kids is to bring out a calendar and to say to them, “Let’s mark the times on the calendar when you are going to have a virtual date with a friend (you can name the friend).” I have found that being very concrete and putting the name of the play date and the time of the date on a calendar brings structure to the situation and, very importantly, is a concrete reminder that “dates” and friendships will continue. Scheduling these dates and putting them on the calendar is also very helpful to all of the kids’ parents as they scramble to create these different dates.
- What do you think about a food delivery or package delivery to someone who is quarantined at home?
Not sure I can weigh in depends on people’s comfort level and I would ask someone who is quarantined. I have been getting food delivered and I have someone quarantined in my home and I feel safe, whereas other people quarantined may have stored up enough and want to control what they are eating. A note will always lift spirits. I think it is very nice, but as Nancy said, I would definitely first check with the person about how comfortable he/she feels about receiving a food delivery or package.
- When kids are having a day where they just don't want to do any of their academics, how do you manage giving them a break but keeping them on track?
I would chose a “mental health day” and they probably could have three of them in this two month period at least. So that may make them be careful about using them up. I would also think about a “mental health day” that they can use. Another possible technique, depending on the child, is to let them take a break with the expectation they would get back to work later. If that technique is used, one can even say, “We all need breaks. Do you think you need an hour break or a two hour break?” It’s always amazing how well this technique works. The specific technique one uses should be based on the attention/activity/developmental level of the child and the academic task that is involved. Part of the need for a break may be based on struggles a child is having.

II. Comments:

Dr. Rappaport Answers in red and Dr. Robert Brooks answers in blue.

- This was great!
- Thank you for a very special webinar
- Thank you very much!!!
- The serenity prayer is always wonderful.
Great idea! I am going to add it in personal control slide next time! Actually, in my workshops I often mention the serenity prayer when I mention “personal control.” They certainly parallel each other.
- Thank you for this.
- I liked the idea of talking about Feelings rather than talking about the virus. Some parents are not sharing information/details with their preschooler and when on ZOOM it would be difficult to redirect a child who may be getting into details when another child thinks they are not going to Disney because the castle is being painted.
So sad. In another arena I frequently counsel parents around what to tell children after a suicide. There is a wonderful article “The telling and the knowing” which is that even when families chose to not tell their

children about suicide frequently a child knows and also that families then lose control of who will tell them . I often encourage families that with tough topics it is about open communication it is not about one conversation. This means making room for questions and figuring out what you are willing to share. When I hear about the castle being painted I want us to balance fantasy and reality. This goes back to the idea that we have to tailor our responses to the developmental level of kids. A three year old is not going to get this virus, (I don't sometimes quite frankly) but they may get that the castle is closed for a while and Cinderella I can't figure out what Cinderella is doing but you get the drift whereas a seven year old needs to know that Disney is closed because it wasn't safe for people to visit right now but as soon as it is safe and people are working very hard to make it safe, Disney will open. Beautiful answer. Nancy. I think a similar question came up during the webinar. As Nancy wrote, my experience is that kids know something is going on and that it helps to identify and label what it is in language they can understand and always include a message of realistic hope.

- I worry that my anger at the way the government is responding to this crisis will negatively impact those around me.

Many of us are in dismay at the incompetence and cavalier attitude of some of those in the government. We probably want to communicate a nuanced thinking recognizing those people who are showing remarkable tenacity and leadership while also allowing us to express some disappointment. Anger never travels alone. Many of us are also grieving at the loss . This interview with Kessler who is at Harvard School of Business and wrote Finding Meaning : The Sixth Stage of Grief and works on LAPD Specialist Reserve for traumatic events (<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>) says the grief is that the world has changed as we know it. We have anticipatory grief with trepidation about what the future holds and a loss of safety. Whether we use prayer, or meditation coming into the present is a useful strategy and grounding us with our senses to dampen the anger or fear. We will survive. I also have anger about the way some people in government downplayed the virus and even saw it as a “hoax,” and this anger was intensified when the same people denied or failed to acknowledge their slow response. What I have found helpful is to focus on my own “personal control.” I have no control over what some government officials have done (or not done), but I do have control over what I can do to help in the situation such as by engaging in “contributory activities.” It also helps me to focus, as Mister Rogers recommended, on the heroes, including those who work in the government such as Dr. Fauci.