

Well-being and Resilience:

Clinical Recommendations to Support Transitions to School Re-opening in LRSD 2020

Positive mental health and well-becoming includes having a sense of enjoyment, building close and caring relationships, achieving goals, learning new things, and having resiliency to cope with life's challenges. The unprecedented announcement of a world-wide pandemic and suspension of classes in Manitoba since March 20 has undoubtedly been a challenge for everyone. Throughout the past four months, the Louis Riel School Division has had the mental health and well-being of all students, staff, and school communities at the forefront.

The realities of COVID-19 have had varying degrees of impact and resulting stress on each one of us in the LRSD community. Understanding the [stress response](#) will help to explain some behaviours and needs that arise and will give direction in welcoming staff, students, and families back into our schools. This document, using the Circle of Courage model, is meant to augment the positive work that is already being done and to provide well-being strategies specific to returning to school after class suspension.

Impact of Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected, we were not prepared, and there was nothing we could do to stop it from happening which contributed to a stress response.

Staff:

Staff have had to shift very quickly to the current situation and have had to adjust previous practices to a new teaching reality. This shift has created both some challenges and some opportunities.

It is important to acknowledge and understand that staff are a diverse group of individuals who each have their own lived experience and will be impacted by the pandemic in very different ways. Some of the stressors that staff may have experienced are concerns over finances, physical health, mental health, challenges learning new technology, challenges in balancing family/work life, grief and loss and/or the potential triggering of past stressors. It is essential that staff acknowledge the stress of the current situation, equip themselves with strategies for supporting students as well as planning for self-care during this time. Staff may find themselves struggling to cope with their own emotions. It is important to plan for self-care and support from others. Staff may find the following strategies helpful:

- Tap in, Tap out- arrange with a colleague to step in for a few minutes when you need a break
- Connect with peers to debrief and share ideas
- Access LRSD wellness [benefits](#)

Staff who are calm and connected with students can co-regulate to support students to remain calm and ready to learn. Planning proactively to anticipate stress behaviors in students by optimizing physical spaces, establishing classroom routines, and teaching students about self-regulation will set the stage for a positive start.

Students:

It is important to consider how the uncertainty and the changes during remote learning could have impacted students' sense of security. While many students adjusted to the “new normal”, some students may have had difficulty and may require additional supports upon return to school. It is essential to listen and be open to hearing about students’ stories. Students have processed this experience in their own way and staff must not assume anything about each individual experience. Keeping open lines of communication with parents and connecting with them is essential if staff see any changes or have concerns.

In addition to the closure of schools, students were also potentially affected by the discontinuation of extracurricular activities and sports, loss of celebrations (graduations), loss of access to teachers and peers, limited access to technology and internet, loss of access to clinical and health supports, limited social connectedness, and employment or potential loss of employment. Some students may have also had to take on additional responsibilities at home, continue working, be quarantined in unsafe situations. In addition, they may have experienced concern about the health and safety of self or other family members, grief and loss, financial stress, worry around academic skills and how the distance learning will impact their future opportunities. Further, the risk of exposure to online related issues may have also impacted student well-being during this time such as cyber bullying or victims of sexual exploitation.

Resiliency and benefits may have also occurred in response to the pandemic. Students may have developed a greater level of connectedness with their family due to the additional time spent together and the omission of extra events, curricular activities, social events, and the general busyness of life. Further students may have developed a sense of mastery by enduring the crisis. Personal growth and development may have also occurred after having to learn more independently.

When staff interact with students’ they should be on the lookout for concerning behaviors and changes in behavior, which can be clues to potential serious issues. The following are examples of clues or signs that may suggest additional mental health support is necessary: a change in mood and behavior, lack of interest in activities that they used to be involved in, some students may feel safer at home and may have an unwillingness to return to school, problems with memory, attention, focus or learning, changes in appearance, talking about death or suicide, frustration with having to catch up academically, excessive worry or fear, depression, low mood, irritability, insomnia, anger and emotional exhaustion.

Some children feel ready for their return to school and may be excited to see their friends and teachers again. Due to being away from their peers and routine structure, some children may feel uncertain about their place amongst their peers and how school will look on their return.

Some children may have enjoyed learning in the home environment and do not want to return to school. It will be important to recognize and acknowledge that students may have a variety of emotions upon their return.

^[1] <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown>

^[2] <https://healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Signs-your-Teen-May-Need-More-Support.aspx>

(3) <https://capmh.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s13034-020-00329-3>

Families:

Families have experienced many changes and transitions during the Covid 19 pandemic. Some families will have been impacted more drastically than others and some will have been strengthened in some ways by this experience.

This situation challenged families in a number of ways including isolation, financial stress, unemployment, uncertainty, disruptions to daily life, anxiety, finding a new normal, supporting their children’s learning, and the loss of face to face interaction and connection. Being together and socially isolated may have led to higher levels of stress and conflict in families. Increased stress heightens the risk of family violence, child abuse, reliance on unhealthy coping strategies as well as mental health difficulties.

Reactions to stress can be positive or negative. Some families have experienced positive changes due to staying at home, isolating, and slowing down from the day to day of life. Some families are spending more time together as a family, eating meals together more often, communicating more, less time on technology and growing closer. Some families have recognized the strength and resilience that they have during these times.

The degree of stress experienced by a family will vary significantly based on many factors. Individuals and families will not be in the same place in the recovery from this ongoing situation as we return to school and a “new normal”.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic from a Circle of Courage Perspective

The [Circle of Courage](#) is a model of positive youth development based on the universal principle that to be emotionally healthy all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The Louis Riel School Division has adopted belonging, mastery, independence and generosity as the central values for education.

Belonging	Mastery	Independence	Generosity
<p>Those who are strong in this value seek pro-social connection with others and demonstrate a sense of emotional connection to individuals singly or in groups.</p> <p>Students who have developed skill or excelled in this value may exemplify the following characteristics, qualities, or skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy interpersonal connections • Friendship • Curiosity • Trust 	<p>Those who are strong in this value feel capable in their abilities and seek out more knowledge. They are willing to fail and view failure as a learning experience.</p> <p>Students who have developed skill or excelled in this value may exemplify the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Success • Creativity • Problem-Solving • Motivation • Persistence • Competence 	<p>Those who are strong in this value have confidence in their ability and regulate their own behavior and manage their lives. They have a well-developed sense of autonomy and accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. Many younger students will still require “inter-dependence”.</p> <p>Students who have developed skill or excelled in this value may exemplify the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Self-Discipline • Self-Regulation • Responsibility • Assertiveness • Confidence • Autonomy 	<p>Those who are strong in this value engage in helpful and thoughtful behaviors by helping those who live in their immediate world without expectation of reward.</p> <p>Students who have developed skill or excelled in this value may exemplify the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altruism • Compassionate • Caring • Sharing • Loyalty • Empathy • Prosocial • Supportive • Inclusive

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<p>Belonging may have been disrupted due to the physical distance measures and isolation that have been implemented. This disconnection may have been experienced due to virtual learning, the absence of peer connection and limited social connection.</p>	<p>Mastery may have been disrupted due to isolation, the lack of routine, fewer opportunities to engage in learning, extracurricular activities and social networks. This in turn may also interfere with their ability to practice their skills and engage in new situations that foster learning and encourage risk-taking.</p>	<p>Independence may have been impacted due to altered schoolwork expectations, which in turn may have influenced student initiative, engagement, and motivation.</p>	<p>Generosity may have been impacted due to changes in priorities, with a greater focus and preoccupation on ensuring one's own health and basic needs. This in turn provides fewer opportunities to connect with, care for, and engage peers/ extended family.</p>
<p>Students who struggle in this area may find belonging by attaching to negative peer influences or activities. Students may appear non-responsive or resistant to the efforts of adult supports.</p>	<p>Students who struggle in this area may display low self-esteem and/or refuse tasks for fear of failure. They may consistently rely on the support of others to start and complete tasks, abandon work when difficult, and/or belittle the efforts of peers.</p>	<p>Students who struggle in this area are likely to display disorganized behavior in the classroom, are easily influenced by others into making poor choices, and do not take responsibility for their own actions.</p>	<p>Students who struggle in this area may have a skewed or absent sense of generosity. They may not display concern for the wellbeing of others. They may be prone to taking rather than giving or display generosity in unusual ways (e.g., giving out of feelings of obligation).</p>
<p>How to enhance Belonging?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop authentic relationships with students. • Provide classroom activities that foster a sense of shared experiences. • Provide classroom activities that foster a sense of community. 	<p>How to enhance Mastery?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice self-regulating strategies as a classroom. • Teach about how the brain works when emotions are strong. • Establish clear classroom expectations and routines. 	<p>How to enhance Independence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of executive functions (*). • Establish classroom jobs and routines. • Provide leadership opportunities. • Teach and provide opportunities to practice 	<p>How to enhance Generosity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate themes related to generosity into Morning meetings. • Involve students in volunteering or community service. • Model and provide opportunities for students to

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate individual strengths and achievements (i.e., birthdays, awards). • Create opportunities for personal sharing (i.e., hobbies, interests, experiences, likes/dislikes). • Validate students' various experiences of their time during remote learning/their time back at school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach and promote a growth mindset. • Provide opportunities for student exploration and curiosity. • Foster a classroom climate that encourages students to reach their full potential. 	<p>problem solving/conflict resolution skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for self-directed learning and goal setting. 	<p>practice inclusion of all students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop collaborative partnerships with community agencies. • Model and encourage acts of kindness. • Model and encourage gratitude practice.
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Supporting Activities from a Circle of Courage Perspective

Belonging	Mastery	Independence	Generosity
FOR ALL STUDENTS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet students at the door. • Sharing Circles. • Community activities (e.g., nature walks) • Create classroom themes for collaborative exploration (e.g., September is "X" awareness month) • Group work allowing each student to hold a purposeful role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing classroom expectations often in the first few weeks (e.g., revisiting expectations re: standing in line, hand raising, thought sharing) • "Celebrating" mistakes • Refer to "the learning pit" resources - James Nottingham • Teach academic self-monitoring (e.g., have students complete their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe: Don't tell students what to do. Ask them to think about what they would do. • Ask students to reflect on why their strategies work for them • Graphic organizers help plan and make sense of information. • Say It Again—Repeat key terms out loud. (the brain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with opportunities to offer peer support to their classmates and/or younger students such as reading buddies. • Provide students with opportunities to participate in community-based projects such as community clean-up. • Teach students to practice gratitude. • Review literature on the topic of generosity,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate accomplishments of all students • Assign weekly classroom tasks that contribute to classroom wellbeing • Morning meetings acknowledging the struggles that were experienced, while also focusing on the factors that helped us through. What did you discover about yourself? This can also be done in art class, in health class, social studies... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For samples on how to structure a morning meeting. • Special Interest Clubs (I.e., art, choir, sports, Lego, etc.) • Increase positive connection with students displaying behavioral challenges. • Dispel rumors, unpack misconceptions, reassure students. • Allow a safe space for students to process their experiences/ make sense of the impact of COVID. Not everyone was negatively impacted by COVID. Use language that shows experiences are on a 	<p>student rubrics to foster goal setting and review progress)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to Zones of Regulation, MindUP curriculum for self-regulating teachings • Teach mindfulness practices (e.g., Calm app, Smiling Mind app, MindUp curriculum, Mindful Bottle toolkit) • Students will be worried about schoolwork and work production. Figure out gaps in learning and reconnect these students to learning. • Meet students where they are at and reassure them it's okay for them to go at their own pace of learning. • Teach the students to be learners again by building their confidence in their ability to believe in their own learning. • Acknowledge that students will need different things. 	<p>needs to repeat to remember)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunk – Teach new information in smaller chunks, more time to Chew • Chew – Process new learning in varied ways, write, draw, talk (collaborate). • Brain Breaks. The brain needs time to process. • Teach organization and prioritizing (p.9) • Self-monitor and self-check (p.18) • Ask higher level questions that create curiosity • Develop flexible thinking skills (p.14) • Improve working memory (p.16) • Teach problem-solving skills (p.26) • Teach study and test taking skills • Visual schedules have been effectively used with people of all ages, from toddlerhood through adulthood. <i>Please consult with your school's clinical team for further support with the development of these schedules if required.</i> 	<p>gratitude, prosocial behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with local organizations if possible, to allow for volunteer opportunities for students. • Provide students with opportunities to collaborate with, help and care for others. • Care for classroom pets. • Create “Valentine Day’s” in September • These children’s books weave in meaningful messages about the beauty of uniqueness and inclusion. • Teachers model patience, forgiveness and kindness, learning to “be with” each other again. • Recognize and understand separation anxiety and fears amongst students, their parents, and staff. • Build on the concept of “treat others how you would want to be treated”.
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<p>continuum, i.e., distress to managing well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase feelings of safety via open transparent communication and collaboration with students, parents and community. • Provide structure, routine and predictability. • Recognize that there will be increased anxiety for some students and their parent(s). • Support student transitions: new student registrations, moving to new classrooms or, in some cases, new schools (grade 6 to 7, or middle school to high school for example) • Make space and time for structured (learning tasks) and unstructured (break times) social engagement. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow independence to come back on track for students who have been out of routine for months. • Allow for leadership opportunities in the classroom. 	
STRATEGIES SPECIFIC TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing circles, “All About Me” worksheets • Engage students in the care of the classroom. For example: assign weekly classroom tasks that contribute to classroom 	<p>*WARNING some students will find quiet/calming activities activating and dysregulating. Ensure there are a variety of options available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yoga practices (e.g., Cosmic Kids – Youtube page) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review children’s literature on the topic of generosity, gratitude, prosocial behaviour (e.g., Have You Filled a Bucket Today? (McCloud, 2006); Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning

<p>wellbeing (e.g., table and board wipe down/passing papers/teacher secretary)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive Muscle Relaxation • Movement breaks (e.g., GoNoodle Youtube page) • Cooperative games • Social skills games • Incorporate children’s literature/videos with teachable moments related to classroom expectation, emotional regulation and social skills (i.e. Howard B. Wiggle Bottom, Social Sprouts (Youtube), WonderGrove Kids (Youtube)) • Inside Out Materials • Big Feelings Come and Big Feelings Go story Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions (Youtube video) • Kimochis curriculum to foster emotional literacy/teaching • Bringing in therapeutic animals to help students self-regulate during possibly dysregulating days (e.g., first week back to school, immunization days) 		<p>About Empathy (Sornson, 2013), Thanks From the Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle, 2017))</p>
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Additional Resources:

Weekly wellbeing lessons for K-12: <https://positiveeducation.myshopify.com/collections/free-resources>

*Executive function information:

- [Executive Functions](#) (EF) in children are the essential [self-regulating skills](#) that we all use every day to accomplish just about everything. They help us plan, organize, make decisions, shift between situations or thoughts, control our emotions and impulsivity, and learn from past mistakes. Kids rely on their [executive functions](#) for everything from taking a shower to packing a backpack and picking priorities.
- This is a [video](#) to explain the concept of Executive Functioning to children and parents.

References

Adapted from:

<https://www.presentlearning.com/circle-of-courage.html>

<https://www.challenginglearning.com/2020/04/13/embrace-the-fall-re-think-learning/>

Schools That Matter: Teaching the Mind, Reaching the Heart, Steve Van Bockern. University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education Publishing (2018). 158 pages.