

Dear Families,

In this time of constant change, we want to assure you that your students remain in our forefront of our thoughts and we will continue to serve them in the best way possible. Understanding that this situation brings a lot of questions and heightens the anxiety of many (adults and students alike), we wanted to share the information below. Also, we wanted you to know that the School Counseling team will continue to be accessible by email to both students and parents. Each counselor is checking their email regularly, will hold weekly virtual office hours (listed below) to allow you to get a real time response and will respond to emails as soon as possible outside of these “office hours”. Additional office hours will be added as the need presents itself.

Counselor	School Site	email	office hours
Alissa Inks	Sierra Elementary	ainks@pusdk8.us	Thursdays 9am – 12
Brittany Wagner	Schnell Elementary	bwagner@pusdk8.us	Tuesdays 9am – 12
Gail Fitzpatrick	Edwin Markham Middle School	gfitzpatrick@pusdk8.us	Wednesdays 9am – 12

My child/family is feeling anxious during this uncertain time. What resources are available for us to better understand and dialogue about COVID-19?

Fear, uncertainty, and anxiety are bound to be heightened with wide-scale disease outbreaks that are contagious, particularly when they involve a new, previously unknown disease-causing agent, as is the case with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This fear and anxiety can especially affect people already suffering from anxiety, and repeated news cycles about the spread of coronavirus do not help this anxiety.

Children and teens may have a particularly hard time making sense of what’s happening in such a scenario, given their pending brain maturation, their lack of experience, and their inherent suggestibility and vulnerability. Seemingly endless news cycles may feel overwhelming, confusing and scary to a child or teen. Children typically possess lesser abilities to decipher and understand from the news, the extent of risk that a disease outbreak poses to them or to their loved ones and friends. This can create a sense of panic amongst children. This may be more challenging when a child/teen is already suffering from an anxiety disorder or predisposed to feeling more anxious in unusual or new situations.

How to talk to your Kids about Coronavirus

Sources: [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) and [National Association of School Psychologists](#)

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unknown disease-causing agent, as is the case with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This fear and anxiety can especially affect people already suffering from anxiety, and repeated news cycles about the spread of coronavirus do not help this anxiety.

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How a child responds to news of novel coronavirus may depend on several factors, such as 1) age of the child, 2) language/comprehension abilities and developmental level of the child, 3) presence, severity and type of anxiety disorder(s) or other psychiatric conditions, 4) prior history of trauma or serious illness of loved ones or self, 5) occurrence of other recent stressors or major life events (such as parental divorce, death of loved ones, major move, change of school), etc. Therefore, a parent's response would need to be tailored to the individual situation and context surrounding their child/teen.

Remain calm and reassuring.

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.
- If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.
- Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available.

- Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
- It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.
- Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.

Avoid excessive blaming.

- When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone.

- Keep Explanations Age Appropriate.
- It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.
- Bullying or negative comments made toward others should be stopped and reported to the school.
- Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different from the values that you have at home.

Monitor television viewing and social media.

- Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.
- Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
- Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.
- Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young
- Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

- Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.

Be honest and accurate.

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.
- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.
- Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to protect yourself.
- For additional factual information contact a health care practitioner, or check the following websites:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
 - <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-talk-your-anxious-child-or-teen-about>

- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- <https://www.childlifepodcast.com/2020/02/29/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Take Time to Talk

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

When sharing information, it is important to make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves.

Information is rapidly changing about this new virus—to have the most correct information stay informed by accessing <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

- **Early elementary school children** need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”
- **Upper elementary and early middle school children** will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.
- **Upper middle school and high school students** are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

Additional Resources: Coping with Stress During Infectious Diseases

- [PBS](#) **How to talk with your child about coronavirus**
- **SAMHSA** *Talking With Children: TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS DURING INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS*
- **SAMHSA** *Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks*

- [CDC Manage Anxiety & Stress](#)
- [NCTSN](#)
- [How to talk to your Anxious child](#)
- [COVID-19 Lockdown Guide: How to Manage Anxiety and Isolation During Quarantine](#) - ADAA Blog Post, Aarti Gupta, PsyD
- [How to Talk to Your Anxious Child or Teen About Coronavirus](#), ADAA blog post, Richa Bhatia, MD
- [ADAA March Triumph E-Newsletter - Managing Coronavirus Anxiety, Personal Stories of Triumph and More...](#)
- [Quick Expert Tips to Manage Coronavirus Anxiety Part Two](#) - ADAA video - ADAA members Ken Goodman, LCSW, Drs. Debra Kissen, Reid Wilson, and Sally Winston share expert tips to manage coronavirus anxiety.
- [Panic Sells, Calm Saves](#) - ADAA Blog Post - ADAA member Dr. Shane Owens
- [Quick Expert Tips and Strategies to Manage Coronavirus Anxiety](#) - ADAA 5 minute Video - ADAA member Dr. Debra Kissen
- [Health Anxiety: What Is It and How You Can Overcome It](#) - ADAA Webinar - ADAA board member Ken Goodman, LCSW
- [Health Anxiety: What Is It and How to Beat It](#) - ADAA Blog Post - ADAA board member Ken Goodman, LCSW

Fun Activities to Avoid “Cabin Fever”

Maintaining a daily schedule of some sort is helpful for children during this time. There are [dozens of ideas](#) about how to organize your day so that students can find comfort in routine. One of our very own teachers, Christy DeGaugh at Sandra J. Gallardo Elementary, recommends:

- Keep sleep routines - regular sleep goes a long way to keep us grounded and functioning well
- Eat healthy - our food intake affects our energy, focus, and outlook
- Plan 1 fun thing each day - even 10 minutes of tag, story time, cards, joke telling, lip syncing...helps with positive bonding and stress reduction
- Divide up jobs at home by creating a daily family chores list - having responsibility and leadership in a task provides a strong sense of belonging...this will also help parents out
- Create a calendar/schedule for each "school" day. Fill in most of the structure of the schedule but save some parts for your kids input-helps for them to buy in to the schedule

Here are some other ideas to keep kiddos busy:

- Watch the Healthy Habits video series from [Sesame Street](#)— then print the free [activity book](#) that goes along with it.
- Do a [daily lunch doodle](#) with children's book author and illustrator [Mo Willems](#).
- stream a kids' drawing class from illustrator [Wendy MacNaughton](#).
- Burn off extra energy with kids' dance routines from [GoNoodle](#).

- Make use of thousands of free K-12 [worksheets and printables](#).
- Cosmic Kids Yoga: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>
- Take walks, hikes
- Bike rides, Roller Skating, Skateboarding
- Play catch, kick soccer ball back and forth
- Create your own workout routine at home
- Listen to music
- Have a Dance Party
- Watch movies [top 10 animated movies 2019](#)
- Make videos
- Play video games
- Connect with friends over phone or internet
- Play board games, Puzzles
- Arts and crafts
- Playdough [How to make play-dough](#)
- Online learning opportunities
- GoNoodle (Indoor recess videos) <https://www.gonoodle.com/>
- YouTube - Yoga videos
- Cook meals together/Baking
- Chalk Art on driveway
- Water coloring
- Fly a kite
- Have your own fashion show
- Go on every Disney ride via YouTube
- Teach your dog a new trick
- Play hide and seek, Flashlight tag (At night)
- Make paper airplanes
- Make a fort and read a book together [How to build a fort](#)

Mindfulness Activities (To help children relax, manage stress)

Mindfulness simply means paying attention to the present moment with kindness and curiosity and without judgment. It's intentionally drawing your awareness to thoughts, feelings, or sensations happening from moment to moment. Although some religions incorporate mindfulness, it's not tied to religion. Mindfulness is a natural state of consciousness, and the intentional practice of mindfulness can train attention. Research examining mindfulness-based approaches in education has found:

- Improvements in student attention
- Improvements in student social-emotional skills (perspective-taking and empathy)
- Increases in prosocial behavior (sharing and including others)
- Decreases in aggression and symptoms of depression

Mindful Posing

One easy way for children to dip their toes into mindfulness is through body poses. To get your kids excited, tell them that doing fun poses can help them feel strong, brave, and happy.

Have the kids go somewhere quiet and familiar, a place they feel safe. Next, tell them to try one of the following poses:

- The Superman: this pose is practiced by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out to the sky, stretching the body as tall as possible.
- The Wonder Woman: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips (Karen Young, 2017).

Ask the kids how they feel after a few rounds of trying either of these poses. You may be surprised.

Spidey-Senses

While on the subject of superheroes, this can be a related “next step” to teach kids how to stay present.

Instruct your kids to turn-on their “Spidey senses,” or the super-focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch that Spiderman uses to keep tabs on the world around him. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in (Karen Young, 2017).

This is a classic mindfulness exercise and encourages observation and curiosity—great skills for any human to practice.

Safari

The Safari exercise is a great way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your kids that you will be going on a safari: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and any other animals as they can. Anything that walks, crawls, swims, or flies is of interest, and they’ll need to focus all of their senses to find them, especially the little ones (Karen Young, 2017).

A similar exercise for adults is the mindfulness walk. This exercise provokes the same response in children that a mindful walk elicits in adults: a state of awareness and grounding in the present.

If you’re interested in more information on how to encourage the practice of mindfulness in children and teens, you can check out the other exercises from this website.

Otherwise, head on to the next section where we lay out key tips for teaching these concepts.

Positive Thinking (<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/chart-for-kids>)

Practice positive thinking each day for two minutes. Choose two phrases from below or make up your own. Breathe in silently saying one phrase; breathe out saying a different one.

- I am good.
- I am kind.
- I am enough.
- I am smart.
- I am important.
- I am worthy.
- I learn from my challenges. I am gentle with myself.
- I am creative.
- I am loved.

Flip Your Negative Thoughts (<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/chart-for-kids>)

When you notice negative thoughts, flip them around with these steps:

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Think to yourself “Stop. Relax.”
3. Say something positive like “I can handle this.” or “I am strong.”

Grow Your Gratitude (<https://www.pricelessparenting.com/chart-for-kids>)

Feeling grateful is at the root of joy and positive thinking. Each night before you go to sleep, think of three things you are grateful for. Challenge yourself to make one of these things something new that happened today.

What are you grateful for today?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Additional Resources for Mindfulness

- [MindYeti](#) over 30 free mindfulness exercises for children

[Headspace](#) This app teaches parents and children together about meditation for different age levels. They focus on Calm, Kindness, and Bedtime.

Smiling Mind This app has great body scan meditations to help children develop the awareness of what's happening in their bodies. Learning about what's happening in your body is one of the first steps of an authentic mindfulness practice.

- **Three Good Things: A Happiness Journal**. This app is simple and easy-to-use, helping children focus on the positive and recognizing what went well today. (Ages 6 and up.) Every child gets to list three things daily that went well, which begins to train their mind to look for things to appreciate and begin a gratitude practice.
- **Insight Timer**. This app is free with meditations for parents and children. They focus on relaxation, managing **stress**, **concentration**, and sleep, as examples.