

FDLRS Record

Newsletter for the University of Florida FDLRS-MDC program in Jacksonville

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Guidance on Handling Emotional Reactions to Stressful Events

by Meghan Ambrose, M.S.

When a stressful event occurs, it can cause strong and deeply felt reactions in both adults and children. **It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events.** If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents and teachers can help youngsters manage their feelings by modeling healthy coping strategies themselves and closely monitoring their own emotional state and that of the children in their care.

- Shock
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Stress
- Fear
- Worry
- Loss of Sleep

Common Reactions to Stressful Events:

Remain Calm and Reassuring

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- What you say and do can either increase or decrease children's anxiety.
- Let children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.
- 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.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible

- Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Encourage children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.
- Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present. Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

Final Takeaways

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide pertaining to a stressful event. 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 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.



OUR SERVICES

Who we Serve:

- Individuals between the ages of 3 & 22 who have not graduated high school.
- Who are struggling in school and have complicated medical, behavioral, developmental, &/or social histories
- And who reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, & St. Johns counties

Services for Families:

- Comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment, which may include psychoeducational, emotional-behavioral, &/or developmental pediatric evaluations
- Feedback sessions and a report detailing our findings
- Assistance in planning for your child's educational and psychological needs
- Trainings for parents covering a variety of topics

Services for the Community:

- Training/consultations for educators, students, & other professionals
- Educational consultation and support services: This can include collaboration with school personnel to facilitate school placement & provision of services

Keeping Children Focused and On-Task During Distance Learning

by Ashley Parker, MS CCC-SLP

Many parents, including myself, have found themselves in uncharted waters with the introduction of distance learning in order to complete the 2019-2020 school year. Education Week (2020) estimates that 50.5 million students will be impacted this school year. As parents reel from the challenges they now face as a new role of not just a parent and employee, but now as a facilitator of learning, children also find themselves with a new normal, and many struggle to meet the demands and expectations. This is especially true of children with exceptional educational needs, though even typically developing children who do not generally require additional assistance with accessing the curriculum may also find their own struggles with staying on task and completing assignments. Combined with the disruption of



of routines, the inability to socialize with friends or run around on the playground to find that “break” during their school day, and the general uncertainty of the world during a global pandemic, families across the country need strategies to increase student success and decrease student frustration. Here are a few tips from experts to help keep kids focused and parents (hopefully!) less stressed.

1. Routine, routine, routine! Kids love it, parents often do not even realize that they rely on their own routines, and when they are disrupted, chaos ensues. During this time, educational expert Jessica Suss (2020), recommends getting children up at a reasonable time, getting dressed, and eating breakfast, just as a child would do getting ready to head to school on a typical day. Ask your child’s teachers what they do to transition from one activity to the next and implement that; often times using a visual timer so children can visually monitor how much time they have on each task (or during a break) can help motivate them to complete a task, transition from one task to another, or to visually see when a break time will end and school time can resume.
2. Another way to help children focus is to set up a “school area” within the home. This does not require a large house or even a room with a door; even if it is in the child’s room, setting up a place where they know their books, paper/pencils, and computer are easily accessible and clearly outlined that this area is for schoolwork only can help children feel more calm and shift their brains into “school mode” (Fabiano 2020).
3. For children with identified Specific Learning Disabilities, Developmental Disabilities, and ADD/ADHD, breaking assignments up into well-defined pieces or sections may help. Perhaps a child has been assigned an online article to read at their instructional level and answer questions to answer about it. They may benefit from reading one paragraph, and then telling you what they read. Have them do this for each section so that you can be sure they are understanding what they have read and lessen frustration. Teachers often have children refer back to the text, and utilizing tools through Microsoft Word, for example, such as the highlight feature, can also assist students who are more accustomed to highlighting a printed text in order to find information.
4. The following are a couple of websites that our very own Gina Bauer (UF Jax FDLRS-MDC) has found that may help educators and parents:
 - a. [www.pdfcandy.com](http://www.pdf candy.com) is a website that allows files to be uploaded and converted into different types of files. For example, if a child typically struggles with handwriting answers to an article, or if an article is given in pdf format, that file can be converted into a Microsoft Word file, where

Continued from pg. 3

highlighting is easily done, and answers to questions may be typed instead of hand-written. If the teacher requires it is submitted as a pdf, it is easily converted back into that format. This website is free and does not require any specialized software downloads besides what you would normally need in order to access the type of document (for example, your computer would need Microsoft Office in order to access a Word document anyway, or Adobe to access a pdf).

www.naturalreaders.com is a website that can be used to assist parents if their children benefit from hearing directions, a text, or assignment read aloud.

5. Some of you are also becoming therapy assistants during this time! Speech/Language, Occupational, and Physical therapies do not cease during school shut-downs, but they certainly look different. Teletherapy means reduced service times for many students, but take an active role in your child's therapies, helping to redirect their attention to the therapist on the screen, and taking instruction from the therapist in order to implement activities at home. Remember that especially during crisis situations, the goal of therapy is to help children access curriculum and maintain skills; if you do not see an increase in skills during this time it does not mean that you or the therapist are failing.

These are uncertain times for everyone, and implementing structure, strategies, and keeping in close communication with your child's teachers and therapists can help reduce overall frustration and keep your children on task. Please also note that many companies and institutions, including UF Jax FDLRS-MDC are offering webinars for educators and parents to help support during COVID-19.

Sources:

- Education Week (2020). Map: coronavirus and school closures. Retrieved April 22, 2020 from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures.html>.*
- Fabiano, J (2020). 9 tips for parents navigating online learning with their children due to coronavirus. Retrieved April 22, 2020 from <https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/tips-for-parents-online-learnign-with-children>.*
- Suss, J (2020). Teachers share their top tips for distance learning at every age. Retrieved April 22, 2020 from <https://www.marinmagazine.com/teachers-share-their-top-tips-for-distance-learning-at-every-age/>.*

<https://pediatrics.med.jax.ufl.edu/diagnostic-and-learning-resources/>

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UF-Jacksonville
FDLRS-MDC serves
Baker, Clay, Duval,
Flagler, Nassau, &
St. Johns County.



Social Distancing Got You Down?

by *Marlena Jenkins, MS., BCaBA*

2020 started with a bang like many years before, and quickly got many people feeling down in the dumps with the rise of the coronavirus. Students are among the many who have had their routines disrupted and their relationships negatively affected by quarantine and social distancing orders, and the closure of many schools, parks and recreational places of interest. While parents strive to maintain a schedule and stick to a routine (The Child Mind Institute, 2020), students long for the day they can return to their regularly scheduled activities, which include, the classroom, goofing off with their friends, and yes, even their teachers, and getting outside for some old classic fun.

According to the team at Playworks (Playworks, 2020), there are six simple principles of play:

1. Every kid has the opportunity to play every day—from the classroom, to the playground and in the neighborhood.
2. Kids get to choose to play and to choose games that make them happy.
3. Kids have the right tools to resolve playground conflicts on their own.
4. Adult play alongside kids, modeling and supporting a culture of trust, positivity and inclusion.
5. Play is not treated as a reward to be revoked.

6. Everyone is welcome to join in the game because playing together is a great way to build community.

Following these six principles, families can play together anywhere. Don't forget to be silly, channel your inner child and let loose, make mistakes and laugh at yourself. Who says we can get closer while socially distancing ourselves.

Playworks has several resources and downloadable game guides for usage by school personnel and parents, including, Work Play Balance, Life Skills Guide, and Game Guide.

With the category of play taken care of, let's explore social-emotional health.

As parents and caregivers have been thrust into spending more time with their *child, they should be reminded to keep a watchful eye out for signs of distress or social emotional decline. When engaging with your family, parents are encouraged to find nonthreatening and natural ways of asking the simple, yet loaded question, "How are you feeling?" Brace yourself for the answer and be prepared to validate your child or teen's concerns (The Child Mind Institute) for themselves and those around them. Explain why many people are wearing masks and staying indoors, why their playdates have been cancelled and the movie theaters are empty. Be okay dwelling in the realm of the unknown. No one knows when we will be permitted to return to the days of mask-less interactions and close physical contact, so don't offer up ideas or speculate when the "end" will come. Help your child or teen grieve the loss of experiences and milestones that have been missed due to the coronavirus. If within your ability, celebrate with loved ones virtually or arrange for drive-by parades. I was encouraged to see a drive-by birthday party within my neighborhood for a young girl who recently turned 10. These types of activities help to maintain a sense of normal for children and keeps them positively connected with their friends, neighbors, and those they have established relationships with.

The Child Mind Institute encourages parents and caregivers to be mindful of what they are watching and listening to. With the news constantly rolling with updates regarding the coronavirus, it may become more and more difficult to keep a positive mindset with regard to the future. Children may have an exceptionally more difficult time processing this information due to their age and lack of maturity. Model taking breaks from technology and conversation related to COVID-19. Remind your family members of goals they have set and do something meaningful to work toward those goals. Praise your child for the efforts *he is making, and show him through your example how to work through your own social emotional downfalls and hurdles.

It is important to help your child get up, but it is more important that you get up together.

*child and he have been used universally to represent children of all ages and genders.

Resources:

<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-support-children-and-yourself-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>

<https://playworks.org>

Chores: The Secret to Success

by Audrey Bringman, M.Ed.



Chores give youth a sense of responsibility and are a great predictor of success in adulthood. Chores are also an important independent living skill and crucial for preparing adolescents as they transition to adulthood. Further, chores help youth work on following instructions, sequencing activities, and can help with visual spatial skills. It is important to consider chore expectations according to your child's developmental level. For students with intellectual and cognitive differences, there often is a difference between chronological age and developmental age, and understanding this will help you set your child up for success. The chronological age is how old your child is based on his or her birthdate. The developmental age is a measure of your child's intellectual, cognitive, language, adaptive, and behavioral abilities. Therefore, it is possible for a child with a developmental disability to be chronologically 7 years old, but developmentally closer to a 2-3 year old level. If we move forward with this example, a child with a 2-3 year old developmental level would be reasonably expected to make his own bed, put dirty laundry in the hamper and put toys away. Additionally, a child who is developmentally 6-9 years old should be able to do what a 2-3 year old can do, and more complex chores, such as putting away groceries, loading or unloading the dishwasher, sweeping or vacuuming. For more information on reasonable chore

expectations, check out the resources below.

It is important to teach your youth these skills according to your household expectations. Each family has different processes and expectations for dusting, vacuuming, doing dishes, laundry, etc. When you involve your child from a very early age, you will probably get more buy-in and commitment from your child. Use praise and encouragement and show appreciation for their contributions to the household. When teaching your child a chore, you can model, show videos, and practice doing it with your child. Try the "Tell, Show, Do, and Review" model for teaching and understand repetition is crucial to learning and improving. During the "review" phase, parents can take a brief video of your child doing the chore so that the steps can be reinforced and you can discuss ways he can improve.

A simple search shows a plethora of chore charts online; choose a chart that is good for your family, developmentally appropriate, and may contribute to the motivation of your child.

References & Resources:

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- Vinopal, L. (2019, August 5). Kids who do chores are more likely to be successful. Here's why. Ladders| Fast on your feet. <https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/kids-who-do-chores-are-more-likely-to-be-successful-heres-why>

Bilingualism and Language Delay

by Ashley Parker, MS CCC-SLP

A common question I'm asked has to do with typical language development for children who are growing up exposed to and learning more than one language. Parents often ask some variation of the question, "Could the fact that my child hears two languages be impacting their language right now? Is it my fault they aren't talking yet because they're confused?" Let me take this opportunity to not only answer that question, but give some data about language acquisition for bilingual children.

The short answer to this question is no, raising your children bilingual does not impact their language development in any negative way, and will not cause your child to have a speech and language delay. According to the US Census Bureau, only 20% of Americans speak more than one language, compared to 56% of the rest of the world (US Dept of Education). With over half of the world being bilingual, and less than ¼ of Americans being bilingual, it is easy to see where many professionals, including teachers and physicians, have been known to tell families that they should only speak one language to their children as to not confuse them or delay their acquisition of the community language.

Many parents and professionals believe that children raised bilingual have smaller vocabularies than monolingual children. While it is generally true that bilingual children know fewer words in each language, combined they typically have larger vocabularies than their monolingual counterparts (Paradis 2011) and will typically say their first words in the same "typical" range (Meisel 2004). Language acquisition is language acquisition, and whether a child is more than one at one time, the child will acquire language in the same way as their monolingual counterparts.

One of the biggest behaviors exhibited by children being raised bilingual that contributes to the thought that they are "confused" is something called code-switching or code-mixing: this is seen widely throughout cultures and languages where children will use both languages within the same sentence. For example, a child may say "And then I said alto", using the Spanish word for "stop" in a sentence which otherwise utilizes English structure and vocabulary. While it may seem that they are confused, they are not. In fact, they are following

the path of typical language development: it is considered very typical for a child to call any 4-legged brown creature a dog when it is in fact another animal entirely, they just don't have the vocabulary yet. The code-mixer may well be using the more easily accessible vocabulary to help him with his communication. People who are bilingual are expected to be able to switch between their two languages at a moment's notice; code switching and/or mixing is the early way that these children show they are learning both languages adequately (Goldstein & Kohnert 2005).

Another common concern by parents is that their children do not prefer their "home" language, and instead prefer English, so that is what they choose to speak to them. Research shows that a more balanced exposure to both languages leads to balanced acquisition of language as a whole (Thordardottir 2011); the classic phrase "use it or lose it" holds true here. If children are not exposed consistently to both languages, or only when certain people are around, such as when grandparents come to visit, they will not acquire language. Many people will choose a preferred or dominant language, but that does not mean that children cannot or will not learn a second language, and benefit from knowing and using it.

As we can tell from this research that has been done, raising children to be bilingual is not only not a detriment to language development, but in some cases may actually result in larger vocabularies. If you feel like you are worried about your child's language, bilingual or not, reach out to a licensed and certified Speech Language Pathologist.

Resources:

Meisel, J. (2004). The Bilingual Child. In T. Bhatia & W. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingualism*. pp 91-113. Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Paradis, J. (2010). The interface between bilingual development and specific language impairment. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 31, 227-252

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Available online: <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=>

Drop in. We are here for you!



The staff of the **UF Health Jacksonville Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)** and **Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System-Multidisciplinary Center (FDLRS-MDC)** are happy to announce a new method of connecting with families and agency personnel in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau and St. Johns counties. **Zoom Office Hours** are a great way to touch base with a clinician, ask questions about our program or services, and troubleshoot concerns you have for yourself, or on behalf of your loved one diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, dual-sensory impairment, social communication disorder or related disability, or other learning, behavioral or social-emotional disability.

- You must join from the web browser and not the Zoom App. <https://zoom.us/join> then enter the Clinician's Meeting ID

Register to meet with a specific clinician or select any day/time that works for your schedule.

Clinician Zoom Schedules, Contact information, and Connection Details:

Clinician Name	Email Address	Zoom Meeting ID	Zoom Office Hours	Start Date
Marlena Jenkins	marlena.jenkins@jax.ufl.edu	946 8603 9137	Wednesday 2p-4p	July 29, 2020
Audrey Bringman	audrey.bringman@jax.ufl.edu	910 7434 0785	Wednesday 11a-12p Thursday 11a-12p	July 29, 2020
Gina Bauer	gina.bauer@jax.ufl.edu	978 8199 0383	Wednesday 3p-5p	August 7, 2020
Katrina Ressa	katrina.ressa@jax.ufl.edu	993 4281 5821	Wednesday 9a-10a Thursday 9a-10a	Sept 9, 2020
Anne Wilson	anne.wilson@jax.ufl.edu	994 0007 0601	Monday 10a-11a Wednesday 10a-11a	August 3, 2020
Chanel Baldwin	chanel.baldwin@jax.ufl.edu	918 3392 2952	Monday 3p-4p Thursday 3p-4p	August 3, 2020

Instructions: Log into Zoom and enter the meeting ID for the meeting you wish to join. After completing the brief registration form, you will be admitted to the Waiting Room. When the Clinician is available, they will admit you into the session and begin your appointment. Messages will be sent to those in the Waiting Room to update participants on the anticipated start time of their session.

The above listed Zoom office hours are good through December 18, 2020

Note: Prior attendance at a CARD Orientation is required to become a registered constituent with CARD.



UFHealth.org

