

6/3/20

Dear VOA Families,

We have been facing many challenges during this global pandemic. We have all been experiencing feelings of frustration, isolation, loneliness, and sadness. We are grieving the loss of our pre-pandemic lives and now there is an additional loss...one that is difficult to comprehend, let alone explain to our children: The loss of another African American man, George Floyd, at the hands of police. While there are no words to lessen the impact of this, I can say, more than ever, how important it is that we be WITH our children and youth. We must listen and give them a chance to be heard. Below, please find some guidance on how to support your young person as they process the many feelings they are having right now. Also know that we have staff who are here to support. Please reach out to us. If you call 612-375-0700, Olga, our receptionist will connect you with someone who will be able to talk with you.

In partnership,
VOA HS Staff

How Families and Caregivers Can Support Students

1. Take care of yourself. Really. You and your feelings matter.
2. Children will take their cues from you. Just as they share in your moments of joy, they will also share in your pain. Please be sure that you don't give them more of your pain than they can manage.
3. Provide as much consistency as possible. Be available even if they don't seem to need you. Just be present. This helps to promote feelings of safety and security.
4. Attend to the physical needs; make referrals and connections to those who can help.
5. Focus any conversations on feelings and be an active, avid listener.
6. Sometimes they just don't want to talk about it. And that is okay.
7. Listen. Listen. Listen.

Supporting by Listening Through Grief, Loss, or other strong emotions

- Most often, what people want most is someone to talk to about their experience:
 - Someone to care
 - Someone to really listen
 - Someone to lean on or cry with
- How to let people know you are listening
 - Actively listen when someone needs to talk: turn toward the speaker, speak calmly, listen more than speak, summarize, reflect. During remote connection, this also means striving to make the virtual space free from other distractions.
 - Make eye contact if appropriate and strive for a warm facial expression

- Listen more, talk less
 - Your compassionate presence is more important than your words.
 - Try not to interrupt.
 - When you do speak, do it in a calm, warm tone
 - Label, summarize, and mirror the feelings the other person is expressing.
 - Do ask questions to clarify.
- Things NOT to say
 - I know how you feel.
 - Let's talk about something else.
 - You should work toward getting over this.
 - You are strong enough to deal with this.
 - I know how you feel. (But it's okay to say, "I feel sad too.")
 - You'll feel better soon.
 - You need to relax.
 - Also, don't judge. Questions like "Why?" and "Why not?" and evaluating the worth of what someone else did or didn't do don't help.

Behaviors to Watch For

Your child may show some of these behaviors immediately or days, weeks, or even months after an incident. If these last for a prolonged time or seem to get worse rather than better, reach out to your health care provider.

- Shock/denial
- Restlessness, anger, aggressive behavior
- Sleeping or eating difficulties
- Headaches, tummy aches, body aches
- Withdrawal
- Sadness, tearfulness
- Poor concentration
- Unexpected fears and worries
- Acting younger than their age
- School avoidance

More Resources for supporting your child:

Tara Tappe, VOA High School's licensed mental Health practitioner, is available for your student.

Tara.tappe@voamn.org

612-505-1069

Betsy Walter, VOA High School's Licensed School Social Worker, is available for your student.

Betsy.walter@voamn.org

612-375-0700

The Minneapolis Public Schools Caring Corner contains a collection of mindfulness and self-care resources including guided meditations, breath and movements activities as well as ideas for caring for others. The link below is publicly available to all.

<https://sites.google.com/view/mpscaringcorner/home>

Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after a Critical Incident

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uU8lqBhioUoJcC6_cpcVuKWB1Nc4YgTh5ZqlkO0VuNs/edit

[Minneapolis Public Schools Mental Health Support Page](#)

7 Ways to calm a Young Brain in Trauma, Edutopia <https://www.edutopia.org/article/7-ways-calm-young-brain-trauma-lori-desautels>

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health: Discussing Traumatic Events with Youth.

<http://www.macmh.org/2017/10/resources-for-navigating-conversations-with-young-people-about-traumatic-events/>

National PTA: discussing difficult topics with your children: <https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/health/Emotional-Health/Discussing-Difficult-Situations-With-Your-Children>

Child Mind: Supporting Families During Covid-19: <https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>