

The Emotional Crisis for our Students is Here, and Our Schools are Ill-Equipped

CHICAGO, IL, USA, August 31, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Eight-year-old Mandy keeps asking her mother when she can go back to school. She misses her friends and her teachers but also feels afraid about returning to her large elementary school in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. She questions her mother, "Mommy, can I get sick? Are there bad germs in my school?"

Life for children in the age of COVID-19 is challenging. This is especially so because, as our children return to school, online or in-person, schools are ill-equipped to handle this crisis. In part, it's because teachers were taught how to teach the ABCs, not how to handle tears and terrors. In part, it's because the strategies and protocols educators have access to deal with the crisis offer complex, arduous, difficult-to-implement plans.

Ideally social-emotional learning (SEL), now a multi-million dollar industry, should be the foundation in the classroom to make children feel connected, safe and secure. Universities have opened departments to study and promote SEL, and corporate and foundation donors pour millions into this arena.

Yet, if teachers want more information on SEL, finding it can be daunting. Take for example our country's leading SEL organization, The Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). On July 9, 2020, CASEL released their "Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social Emotional Learning Roadmap for Reopening School" plan. This link takes the reader to a 52-page overview that references the "over 40 organizations" with whom they've collaborated.

As you move through this overview, you are offered about 200 links to other organizations offering more resources. As I followed many of these links, I counted more than 2,000 pages of reference materials and links to even more before I had to stop counting, all of which would take me countless hours to sift through, understand, and require training for the teachers before anything is delivered to students.

I'm sure your head is spinning. Mine was!

CASEL's data dump is akin to throwing teachers into the haystack and assuring them that the needle is in there somewhere. I couldn't find one protocol on CASEL's recommended programming that can be easily implemented during this fall semester. I'm sure it's there. After all, I once found Waldo.

Will enough administrators, student service directors, teachers or school psychologists have the time to navigate this site, especially now during COVID? I think not.

Schools need simple life skill lessons that can be used by teachers and parents. Here are a handful of effective life skill lessons for students that teachers or parents can quickly deliver.

Hot Thoughts or Cool Thoughts: When a student is angry, the teacher provides a worksheet with two street signs: one sign says Hot Thoughts; the other street sign says Cool Thoughts. The students write their thoughts on side streets branching out from both.

For anxiety, street signs might be named: "Big Problem or Little Problem."

For academic performance, street signs might say: "Routines That Waste Time or Routines That Get Things Done."

In my practice, I often ask students, "Are you in Danger or Discomfort?" If they don't fear being infected with COVID, they might respond "I'm in discomfort." If they fear being infected with COVID, they might respond, "I'm in danger." From there, we discuss how to tolerate feeling anxiety and strategies to cope with it.

This school year let's embrace the less-is-more philosophy and keep it simple for our students. We can do so by offering simple strategies to better reduce stress, make friends, and feel happier. For those students who need more support and intervention, our talented mental health professionals can implement more complex strategies.

RESOURCES

Student Life Skills: Two Minute Lessons to help children reduce worry and anger, develop life skills to increase happiness and health – www.StudentLifeSkills.com

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence – Managing Anxiety Around COVID-19: Tips for You and Your School Community

Social-Emotional Learning: Not Just for Kids. In this post on The Cult of Pedagogy, Wendy Turner explains how she models the five core SEL competencies in her classroom and why teachers should lead by example.

Common Sense: Emotional Intelligence Apps and Games -

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/emotional-intelligence-apps-and-games>

Elementary School Counseling: Identifying and Expressing Feeling -

<http://www.elementaryschoolcounseling.org/identifying-and-expressing-feelings.html>

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