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Remote learning, lockdowns and pandemic uncertainty have increased anxiety and depression among adolescents, and heightened concerns about their mental health.

TEENS IN COVID ISOLATION: 'I FELT LIKE I WAS SUFFOCATING'

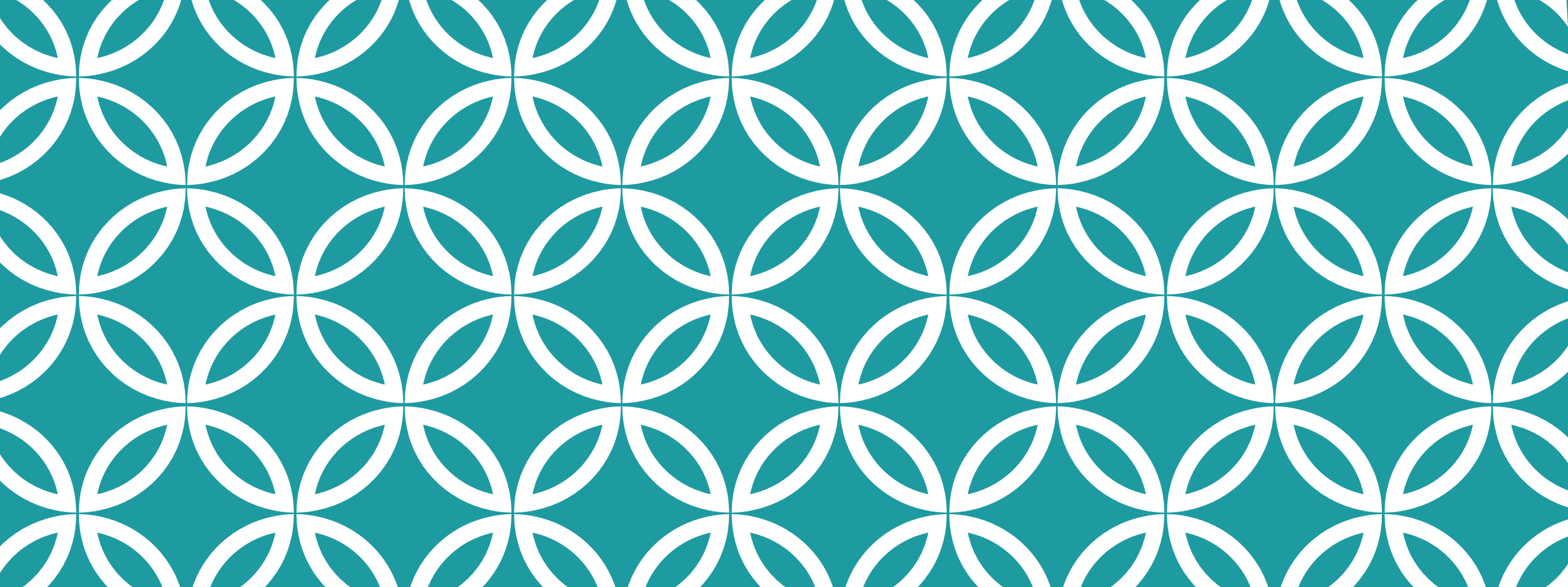
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/12/health/covid-teenagers-mental-health.html>



WORCESTER – The number of children and adolescents seen at the UMass Memorial Medical Center - University Campus for behavioral health needs, including intentional medication overdoses and other suicide attempts, tripled last month, leaving the hospital with a waiting list for beds to treat them.

PANDEMIC FUELS DEMAND FOR CHILD PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

<https://www.telegram.com/story/news/2020/11/05/pandemic-fuels-rise-demand-child-mental-health-services/6168212002/>



PROTECTING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cecile Rousseau, MD & Diana
Miconi, PHD, JACCAP
November 2020

PANDEMIC FUELING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

- Increase in anxiety, depression, sleep problem in general population
- Extraordinarily stressful experience for youths:
 - Public health measures threaten meaning, family dynamics, social environment
 - School closures
 - Peer relationships through unsupervised social media

CONSEQUENCES ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IS DIVERSE

- Some youth are doing OK!
- Sometimes alleviation of disorders (social and school phobias)
- Onset of stress related disorders: PTSD, grief
 - Especially vulnerable are those with pre-existing trauma
 - Family/friends sick or at risk
 - Homeless, uncertain immigration status
 - Existing supports disappear
 - **Trauma informed, resiliency stories**
- Exacerbation of pre-existing conditions: anxiety, depression, OCD, cyber/video game "addiction", eating disorders
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) approach
- Neurodevelopmental Disorders

MARIA AND LISA

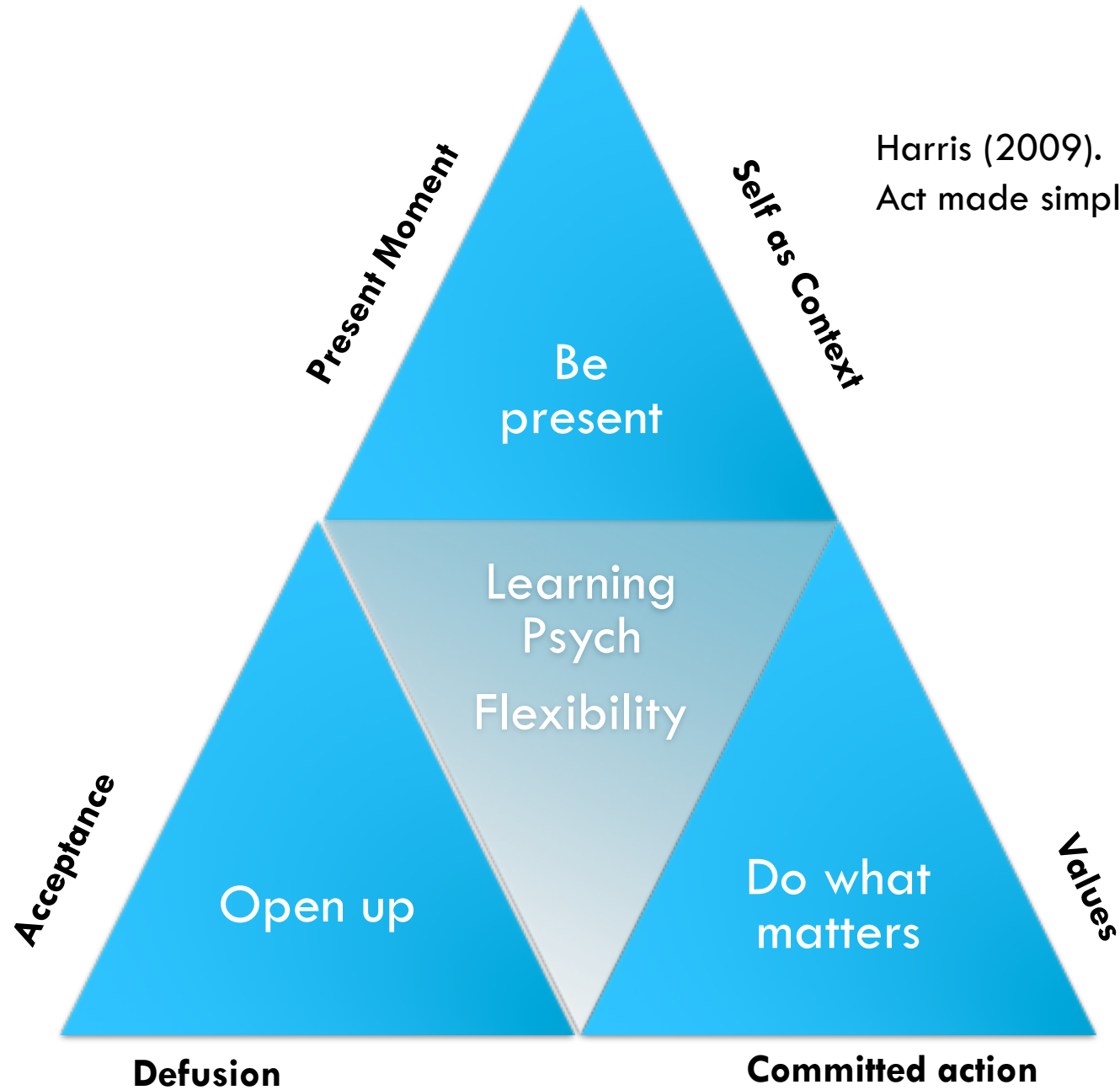


WORKING WITH THE FAMILY

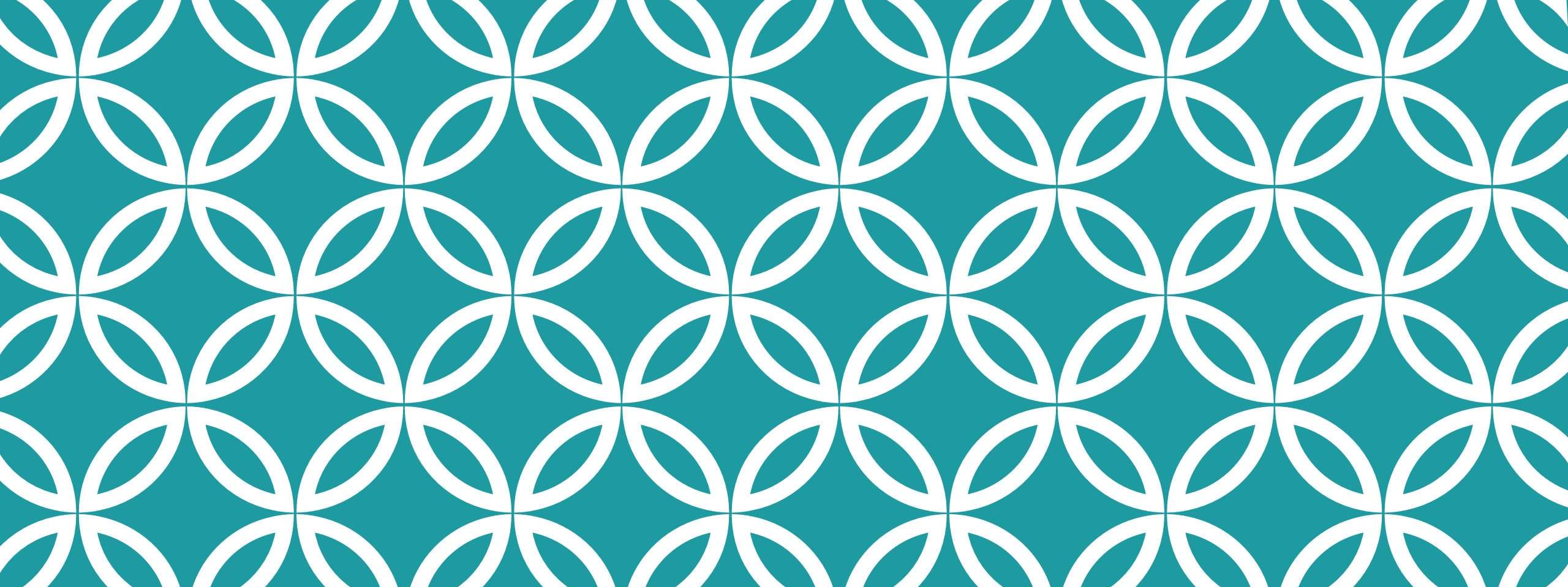
- Family mental health affects youth mental health
 - Parents/guardians fear transmitted into children's anxiety
 - Isolation and uncertainty increases parents' PTSD symptoms
- Frustration, boredom
- Lack of in-person contact with peers
- Lack of physical activity
- Irregular sleep
- Financial strain, crowded homes, abuse/neglect
- Removing schools as a major social and emotional support

Some solutions:

- **Age/developmentally appropriate communication**
- Routines (schedules sleep, eating)
- Play, exercise, learning
- Support for guardians' anxiety – no judgment



Harris (2009).
Act made simple.



RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELL- BEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Authors:

**[Jessica Dym Bartlett, Jessica
Griffin, Dana Thomson](#)**

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CREATE A SAFE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT BY PRACTICING THE 3 R'S: REASSURANCE, ROUTINES, AND REGULATION.

1. **Reassure** children about their safety and the safety of loved ones, and tell them that it is adults' job to ensure their safety.
2. **Maintain routines** to provide children with a sense of safety and predictability (e.g., regular bedtimes and meals, daily schedules for learning and play).
3. **Support** children's development of **regulation**.
 - When children are stressed, their bodies respond by activating their stress response systems.
 - **Validate their feelings** (e.g., "I know that this might feel scary or overwhelming").
 - **Engage in activities that help them self-regulate** (e.g., exercise, deep breathing, mindfulness or meditation activities, regular routines for sleeping and eating).
 - In addition, it is essential to both children's emotional and physical well-being to ensure that families can meet their **basic needs** (e.g., food, shelter, clothing).

KEEP CHILDREN BUSY.

When children are bored, their levels of worry and disruptive behaviors may increase.

Adults can provide options for safe activities (e.g., outside play, blocks, modeling clay, art, music, games) and involve children in brainstorming other creative ideas.

Children need ample time to engage in play and other joyful or learning experiences without worrying or talking about the pandemic.

INCREASE CHILDREN'S SELF-EFFICACY.

Self-efficacy is the sense of having agency or control—an especially important trait during times of fear and uncertainty.

Children often feel more in control when they can play an active role in helping themselves, their families, and their communities. For example, children can help by following safety guidelines (e.g., washing their hands), preparing for home confinement (e.g., helping to cook and freeze food), or volunteering in the community (e.g., writing letters or creating art for older adults or sick friends, sharing extra supplies with a neighbor).

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREGIVERS (WHICH MAY MEAN YOURSELF!) TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES.

Children's well-being depends on the well-being of their parents and other caregivers.

Caregivers must take care of themselves so they have the internal resources to care for others.

Adult caregivers can engage in self-care by staying connected to social supports, getting enough rest, and taking time for restorative activities (e.g., exercise, meditation, reading, outdoor activities, prayer).

Seeking help from a mental health provider is also important when adults struggle with very high levels of stress and other mental health challenges.

EMPHASIZE STRENGTHS, HOPE, AND POSITIVITY.

Children need to feel safe, secure, and positive about their present and future.

Adults can help by focusing children's attention on stories about how people come together, find creative solutions to difficult problems, and overcome adversity during the epidemic.

Talking about these stories can be healing and reassuring to children and adults alike

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF CHILDREN SHOW SIGNS OF TRAUMA THAT DO NOT RESOLVE RELATIVELY QUICKLY.

Emotional and behavioral changes in children are to be expected during a pandemic, as everyone adjusts to a new sense of normal.

If children show an ongoing pattern of emotional or behavioral concerns (**e.g., nightmares, excessive focus on anxieties, increased aggression, regressive behaviors, or self-harm**) that do not resolve with supports, professional help may be needed.

Many mental health providers have the capacity to provide services via **“telehealth”** (i.e., therapy provided by telephone or an online platform) when in-person social contact must be restricted.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BByqa7bhto&feature=emb_logo

Ten Things Parents Can Do to Prevent Suicide

KIDS ARE HOME!

What parents can do to create a safer environment

Many families are under a great deal of stress with the current pandemic. If you notice your child is struggling with their mental health, please contact your pediatrician to discuss these concerns. As an extra precaution, we encourage parents to remove/secure the items below in effort to reduce youth access to potentially dangerous items within the home.



Reducing Access: Firearms

- **Safest option:** Store firearms away from home
 - Trusted friend or relative
 - Storage facility
 - Shooting range
- **Second-best:** Secure storage inside the home
 - Lock box, cable lock, or firearm safe
 - Firearm and ammunition stored and locked separately



Reducing Access: Medication

- Remove and safely dispose of any unneeded medications in the home
- Any medication that needs to remain in the home, secure in a lockbox (both prescription and over-the-counter medication)



UMassMemorial
Health Care

MCPAP

Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program (MCPAP): MCPAP continues to be a mental health service that pediatricians can access when they are seeking urgent consultation to assist them in managing the behavioral health needs of the patients they treat. MCPAP services may include telephone consultation to the primary care physician and, when indicated, a one-time face-to-face evaluation conducted by either a prescriber or a psychiatric social worker to help establish correct diagnoses. MCPAP prescribers will make recommendations to the pediatrician related to psychopharmacology when appropriate. Additional information, archived webinars, screening and toolkits are available on MCPAP's [website](#).

MCPAP: Western/Central Regional Team, phone: **844-926-2727** and email: mcpap@beaconhealthoptions.com.

CHILD EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH

Child Emergency Mental Health: Our Emergency Mental Health Services **508-856-3562** are available 24 hours a day and include on-campus resources in the Duddie Massad Emergency and Trauma Center, as well as our [mobile crisis](#) evaluation teams through Community Healthlink that can assess youth at their homes, schools or other community-based sites. [Mobile Crisis Evaluation:](#) Worcester Team: 866-549-2142
North Central Worcester County Team: 800-977-5555.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN CHILD MENTAL HEALTH UNITS DURING A PANDEMIC

JAACAP, CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES | VOLUME 59, ISSUE 11, P1203-1207, NOVEMBER 01, 2020

- The mental health consequences of a pandemic on youth are associated with communication around the pandemic, as well as with individual, family, and community dynamics.
- The pandemic may trigger anxiety symptoms but also externalizing behaviors (eg, acting out), and increase suicide risk and substance abuse, in particular among adolescents.
- Supporting parents and communities by providing guidance can help reduce stress-related symptoms in children and adolescents.
- Pre-existing mental health disorders in children and adolescents may be exacerbated by the social and family contexts during the pandemic.
- Assessment of **risks of suicide and aggressive behaviors** and development of strategies for risk reduction and safety planning in the context of state and national stay-at-home policies are important components in the role of child and adolescent psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in providing care to individual children and adolescents during this crisis.
- The pandemic has led to an expanded role for **telepsychiatry** in current efforts to reduce safety risks associated with COVID-19 exposure for patients of all ages and healthcare workers.
- The disruption of standard services and health professionals' security concerns call for a **systemic and resilience-oriented approach that relies largely on family and community resources**.
- The elevated stress is likely to cause tensions within institutions and teams. Acknowledging and validating clinicians' legitimate fears and **mobilizing courage and hope** among them is essential.

CENTER FOR AUTISM AND NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

COVID-19 ASD RESOURCES

<https://www.umassmed.edu/globalassets/psychiatry/cando/covid-19-asd-resources.pdf>

Pair-A-Docs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TEPIJONwGw>

SOURCES:

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

JAACAP, CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES | [VOLUME 59, ISSUE 11, P1203-1207, NOVEMBER 01, 2020: Protecting Youth Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Challenging Engagement and Learning Process. Cécile Rousseau, MD, Diana Miconi, PhD](#)