



6 ways to help students' mental health during distance learning

School closures during a pandemic may present numerous challenges for students with and without disabilities. Although educators may not be able to see their students in person while they practice social distancing, they can still provide emotional support. The chart below lists six ways that teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school officials can help the mental and emotional well-being of students while providing online instruction.

| Action | How it aids students' mental well-being |
|---|---|
| 1. Encourage students to keep a regular school routine. For example, a teacher may start an online learning session at the same time she would start class during a regular school day. | Keeping a regular routine for students, especially those with disabilities, will help them focus on their daily tasks. It will also give students a sense of stability and security. |
| 2. Help students organize their time so they can be productive with classwork and academic goals. A teacher could, for example, give students a schedule showing how long they should work on a task. | Students may not know how to manage their time or balance their responsibilities while they work on academic activities at home. A schedule created by the teacher may help students set aside the right amount of time for their classwork and help them make time for other activities, such as household chores and mental breaks. |
| 3. Encourage students to periodically connect with their classmates and other friends through video chat or group chat. For example, a teacher may coordinate with parents to set up a group project that will foster communication between students. | Collaboration with peers on school projects may help reduce the isolation some students feel due to school closures. It may also help improve students' communication and social skills while following social distancing recommendations. |
| 4. Suggest uplifting music, TV shows, or books for students when they are done with the day's virtual lesson. | Certain media, such as the news and documentaries on pandemics on streaming websites, may exacerbate a student's stress. Uplifting media, such as funny TV shows or fun novels may help give students a break from their worries and outside negativity. |
| 5. Promote mindfulness and physical activities. For example, a teacher may suggest that students take a minute at the beginning or end of an online lesson to stretch or take deep breaths. | Doing breathing exercises and stretches may help students calm down. This may help them improve their focus during the lesson or relax and wind down once it's time to log off. |
| 6. Regularly check-in with individual students who are feeling stressed or anxious. A district may, for example, offer students with and without mental health impairments the opportunity to speak with a counselor using telehealth services. | During school closures and social distancing, many students, especially students with anxiety and depression, may feel an increase in loneliness. Frequently checking in with students and providing telehealth services may help students cope and remind them that they are not alone. |

Amy K. Onaga, Esq., covers special education issues for LRP Publications.



© LRP Publications. All Rights Reserved.