• Dr. Koenen: Introduction to forum series
• Koenen group resources are public access
• Email Shaili Jha sjha@hsph.harvard.edu for access to the google drive
• Todays slides and resources referenced will also be available
• Permission to use the information as helpful
• Sessions are being recorded
Mindful Parenting in Uncertain Times

Managing Family Communications About the Coronavirus and Supporting Children

Archana Basu, PhD
1. Development occurs within interconnected systems.
   – Parents / consistent caregivers the most influential

2. Communication is an important way of supporting children.

3. Parental self-care is central to cope and support.
   – Mindfulness
Development within interconnected systems

Community

Faith

School

Co-curriculars

Family

Parents and Siblings

Extended Family

Developmental Stage

Individual Strengths/Challenges

Temperament
Development Occurs within a Layered Context

- Children learn to make sense of their experiences in interactions within these systems and their closest relationships.

- Reliable responsive support is protective in facing challenges.

- Research suggests that supporting parents enhances children’s resilience.
Communication

• Communication plays an important role in supporting children.
  – Informational communication
  – Emotional communication

• See handout on Koenen drive for more information, specific examples by age group/developmental stage.
Communication

• Children talk to parents when they believe the parent is listening.
• They talk when they believe the parent is open to new information.
• In these conversations, they learn the words to use to make sense of their own experiences.

Adapted from Paula Rauch MD
Communication

• Age-appropriate factual communication.
  – E.g, germs, virus, coronavirus…

• Helps children make sense of what they are experiencing or observing.

• Engage in conversation and listen.
  – What questions are on their mind
  – Their concerns
Communication

• Managing media and internet exposure.
• Staying informed without getting overwhelmed.
• School age children/adolescents:
  – Help identify trusted sources
  – Protect healthy curiosity
  – Model healthy media use habits
  – Provide healthy choices (e.g., watching a favorite family movie together, content on TedED)
Communication

• Support your child in avoiding stereotyping
  – “Sometimes people cope with their own worry by blaming others.”
  – Unintended negative consequences for everyone.
  – E.g., people may be less likely to seek medical help if they fear being bullied or judged for being sick.
Communication

Attend to your child’s emotions

• Acknowledge and validate their feelings.

• Provide *realistic* assurance.

• Key goal: Help kids not be alone with their worries.
Communication

Explore how your child is responding

• Different children respond differently to the same information.

• Age, personality…

• Experiencing extra worries can affect how they are thinking and feeling, motivation, and you may notice behavioral changes
Mindful Parenting

- Supporting your children starts with supporting yourself
- May seem paradoxical but attending to yourself, supports your loved ones.
Parenting: we are all making it up as we go

Son: Can I have some?

Me, mouth full of cheesecake: It’s really spicy you won’t like it.
Mindful Parenting

• You have a lot of experience

…and you know your child best.
  – What has worked for your child or your family before?

As a parent I’m already used to all fun things being cancelled.

mark
@TheCatWhisprer

❤️ 1,548  5:55 PM - Mar 11, 2020
Mindful Parenting

• We have been here before in some ways..
• You know the weather prediction
  – Many many (many) rainy days
• Regulate and plan, or panic: both effortful, but only one actually helps
Mindful Parenting

- Help kids focus on what they can control.
  - Choosing and building routines (including flex time)
  - Hygiene behaviors

- Plan for regular replenishment to build emotional stamina.
  - Experiences that make you feel more upbeat
  - Activities that help calm down

- Balancing flexibility and routines.
  - Maintaining some routines
  - Children feel some sense of stability when other aspects of life feel out of control
Mindful Parenting

• Pick your positive coping strategies
  – Get active while practicing physical distancing
  – Stay socially/ emotionally connected (through technology)
  – Prioritize sleep
  – Do something good for someone else
  – Treat yourselves
  – Read or play together
  – Bring out favorite books, games from the past that are associated with comfort……
Mindful Parenting

• Resilience as a process
• Build consistent practices that enhance capacity *to cope and to support*
Mindful Parenting

• Heads up: you are not going to get it right each time…
  – Forgive yourself
  – Returning to repair is the key
  – Bazillion interactions = bazillion opportunities
  – You are not going to know all the answers but you can model how to try and figure it out
  – Your mistakes are teachable moments
Mindful Parenting

- Mindfulness – intentionally bringing your awareness to your experience without judgment.
- Regular practice
- Promotes emotional awareness
- Respond not react
- Plenty of ideas online for adults, age-specific ideas for children, and families.
Mindful Parenting

Are we there yet?: Coping with long term uncertainty

• Practice consciously shifting your focus
  – Why to What now and How
Be intentional in what you choose to attend to…

Making Lemonade…

• Physical distancing is easier in large open spaces…****

• “My older son has taken on home schooling the younger one…”

• “I have known my husband for nearly 20 years… and just learned that he is confused about the rules for Rock Paper Scissors!”

• “I am awesome at practicing social distancing…within my family!” – Student home from college
Building Resilience As a Community

• Unique situations require creative problem solving

• “the singing is at 6 PM every night in Italy off the balconies and then at noon every day we go on the balconies to clap for all the medical people..” ~ Sophia C.,
Acknowledgements

• Family

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• MGH
  – Nancy Rotter, PhD, Deborah Friedman, PhD
  – Paula Rauch MD, Cynthia Moore PhD, MGH Parenting At a Challenging Time Program.

• Carolyn Dayton PhD, Wayne State University
1-minute Mindfulness practice emphasizing Gratitude
References and Resources

MGH for Children:
- How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus

MGH Parenting At a Challenging Time Resources
- Community Crises and Disasters: A Parent’s Guide to Talking with Children of All Ages

SAMHSA
- Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks
- Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children
- Frequently Asked Questions and Answers: Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) and Children
- Get Your Household Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019

National Association of School Psychologists
- Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource
Infants and toddlers (under age 3)

- Can sense a caregiver’s emotional state
- More fussy than usual, or show changes in their sleep or feeding patterns.
- Maintain routines and consistency in caregivers and their environment.
- Familiarity provides a sense of security.
- Offer more physical comfort and soothing.
Preschoolers (3 - 5 years)

• Understand basic ideas about germs and being sick.
• Brief factual explanations.
• Maintain routines. Focus on hygiene behaviors (e.g., washing hands while counting to 20, singing “Happy Birthday” twice through).
• Limit television and online information.
• Encourage normal play and reading. Preschoolers use play to understand and organize their feelings.
• Let your child know you are there to keep them safe.
• Offer more physical comfort and soothing.
School age children (ages 6-12)

• Many more questions.
• Keep it simple and factual.
• Give opportunities to explore feelings and ask questions.
• Reassure your child that you and their school are doing what is best to keep them safe.
• Supervise television and media use. Be available to answer questions that come up.
Adolescents (age 13 or older)

• Get information through school, friends, social media, online sources, or television.
• Typical to seek other sources of information or support, from friends, rather than parents.
• Listen to Learn and Learn to listen.
• Watch, read, and discuss information together.
• Correct misconceptions.
Building Resilience As a Community

• “Why isn’t anyone coming to my house?”
• Connect as a Community
  – Most current solutions involve technology
  – Digital access (and other) disparities