May 26, 2020

Dear St. Luke Community,

Choosing Positive Coping Strategies

Recent events have presented us with new and unexpected changes and challenges. One of the biggest changes we’re all facing is a radically different daily routine. Where we could once count on the ability to divide our time and attention between the demands of work and family, we now grapple with attempting to tend to it all in the same jumbled time frame. Our students are also experiencing this instability, after leaving the familiar routines of school and activities.

For many, health concerns and financial uncertainty have added layers of stress to an already difficult time. During times of prolonged stress, it can be tempting to seek solace in unhealthy ways, including binging on TV, video games or snack foods, and even drug and alcohol use. However, regardless of the challenges we are facing, there are things we can do to ease tension and promote positive reactions to stress in ourselves, our family members, and our students. We can each choose to respond to stress in healthy ways. Three such strategies to promote healthy coping methods are setting a routine for our families and ourselves, being mindful of how we feel, and making healthy choices in how we respond to stress. Each of these strategies will increase our resiliency in the long term.

 **Setting a Routine**

Having a routine provides a stable framework for our lives. There's comfort in the familiarity of rising at the same time every day and following a pattern for work, play and mealtimes. When uncertainty and chaos unfold, creating a new routine can help us add structure to our days and weeks. Tending to all the little rituals and tasks can create a predictable rhythm. By creating a modified version of our typical routine, we can model an effective response for our students, and juggle competing demands by allotting time each day devoted to various tasks and activities. This new routine can be more fluid, but also allow for a predictable cadence throughout the days and weeks.

 **Mindful of Feelings**

Another key strategy is learning to recognize our emotional responses to stress and uncertainty. Awareness of our emotions and our coping mechanisms can allow us the time to pause to process how we’re feeling. Learning to recognize emotions is one of the key principles taught in the Too Good programs. Recognizing and healthfully coping with changing emotions is a foundational life-skill, and most importantly, it can help us navigate these unprecedented times with positive responses and increased resiliency. Challenging times can be a great opportunity to build our capacity for self-awareness and practice regulating responses.

**Healthy Choices**

When we take time to recognize that we’re feeling stress or uncertainty, we can also learn to make positive decisions in response. Choosing positive coping methods will ultimately make us stronger and more resilient. Healthy responses to stress, such as taking a walk, reading a good book, or taking the time to prepare a fun new recipe will bring positivity into each day and make it a little bit easier to weather the storm.  It’s more important than ever right now to take care of ourselves and to cope with stress in positive ways, so that we can help our students and families to do the same. Talk with your students about how each of us are processing the challenges we’re experiencing. Let them know that the emotions they are experiencing are normal. The most important thing is how we choose to respond to challenges we’re facing and to continually hone our ability to choose to cope in ways that strengthen resiliency and promote health.

Make a list of healthy coping strategies that you and your family enjoy. When intense emotions crop up, you’ll have a host of positive response options at your fingertips, making it easier to choose healthful activities. Tell us about your favorite healthy strategies!

Stay safe and healthy!

Mrs. Lauren Giordanella

PDHP School Counselor