

2022

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COVID-19 Pandemic and Children's Mental Health

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Disclosures

- Kim Erlich and Anne Derouin are Members-at-large on the NAPNAP Executive Board
- No financial disclosures

Learning Objectives

- Describe the psychological impact of collective trauma on children/adolescents.
- Describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the presentation of anxiety in the pediatric population.

Through the Lens of Trauma

We acknowledge that we are in the midst of unprecedented times.

We acknowledge that we are each holding a multitude of feelings, responsibilities, fear, and joys- at the same time.

We acknowledge that there are many responses to stress and uncertainty- each of them valid.

We acknowledge that there is no better opportunity to practice compassion and collective care than right now. This is the work.

We acknowledge the critical need for reflection, inquiry and prioritization of the most critical needs.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Collective Trauma

- When trauma occurs, an individual has become overwhelmed by stress to the degree that their physical, mental, emotional, or social wellbeing has been compromised
- Collective Trauma occurs when a traumatic event impacts an entire community or society, having a communal impact and creating a shared memory of the event(s)
- The ongoing pandemic can be interpreted as a collective traumatic event that can generate symptoms related to PTSD
 - Intrusive thoughts, fears, hyperarousal, avoidance, cardiac awareness, insomnia
- Continuous Trauma Reminders
 - Trauma Reminders are are people, places, things or situations that remind you of a terrifying or extremely upsetting event
- As with public health responses to pandemics, different psychological and organizational supports are required for the different phases of a pandemic.

Wolpow et al., 2016

Hirschberger, 2018

Trauma Transformed



COVID-19 Pandemic

What could be more anxiety-provoking than...

A world-wide pandemic that closes schools, forces us all inside,
requires wearing face masks & frequent nasal/oral swabs,
creates mass-hysteria about contamination, encourages social
isolation

and physical distancing, prevents travel, shopping & eating out,
requires distance learning or homeschooling for all, and

d i s r u p t s all normal routines

Climate of Anxiety in Messaging



Robin Beck/AFP Gett, Images



Jesse Costa/WBUR



Etsy



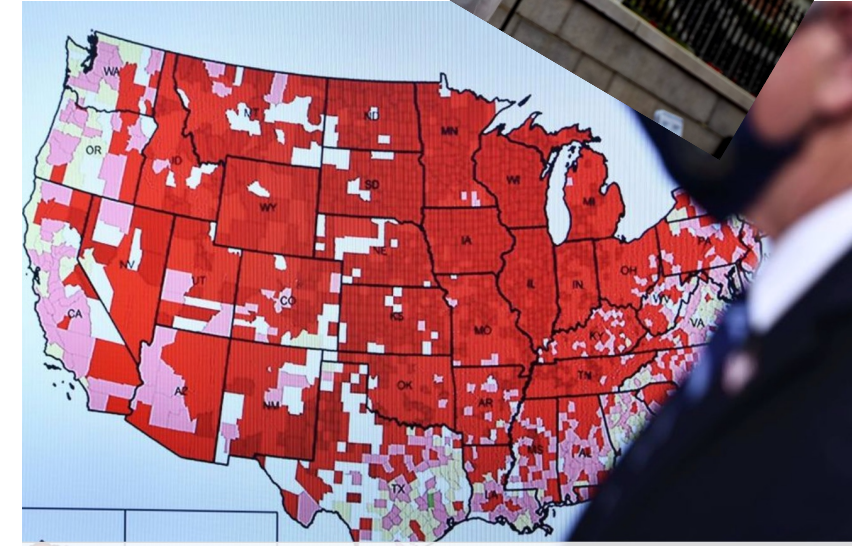
Jesse Costa/WBUR



Experts in pediatrics, Health, May 6, 2020
Advocates for children.



Walgreens



Brendan Smialowski/AFP Getty Images



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The Kids May Not Be All Right. And That's OK

March 31, 2020

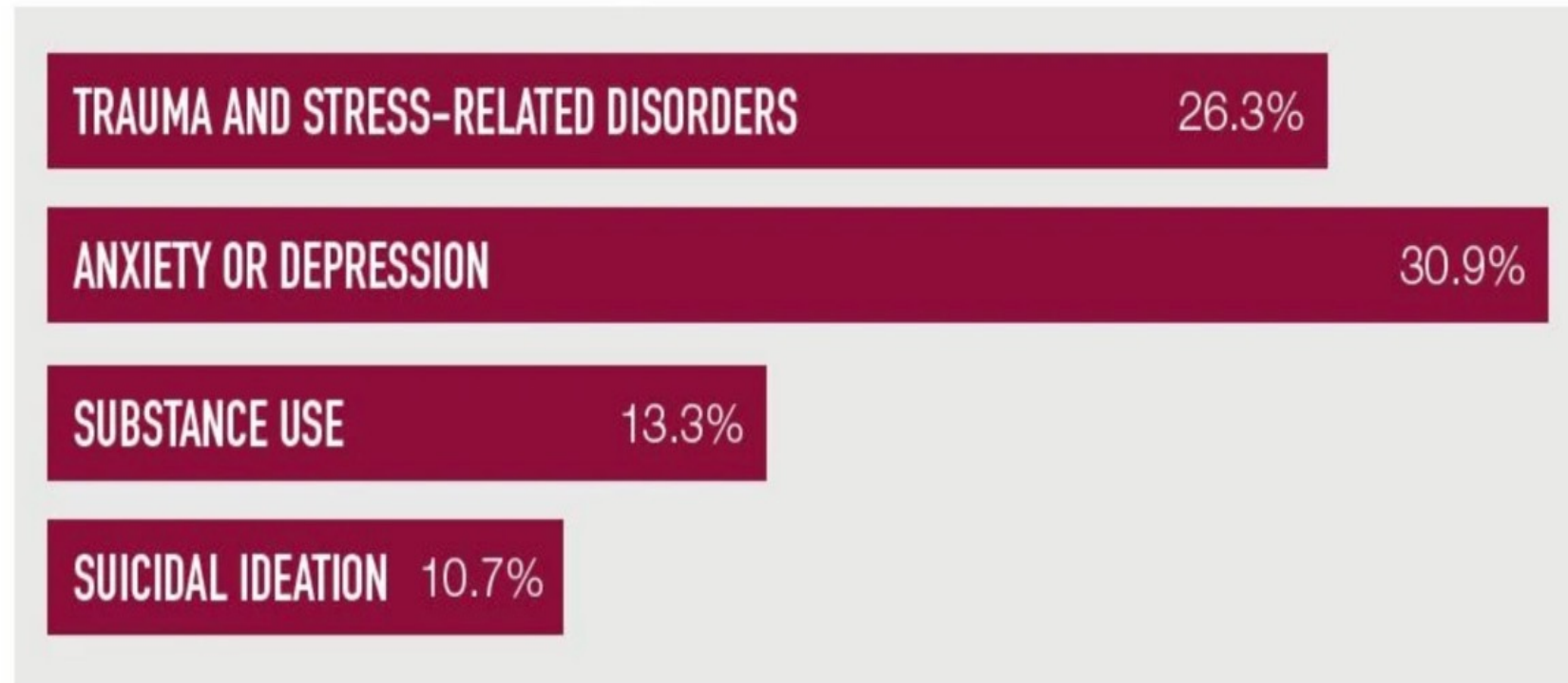
By [Ellen H. O'Donnell](#) 



Rene Böhmer/Unsplash

Kids Feel Our Stress and Respond Accordingly

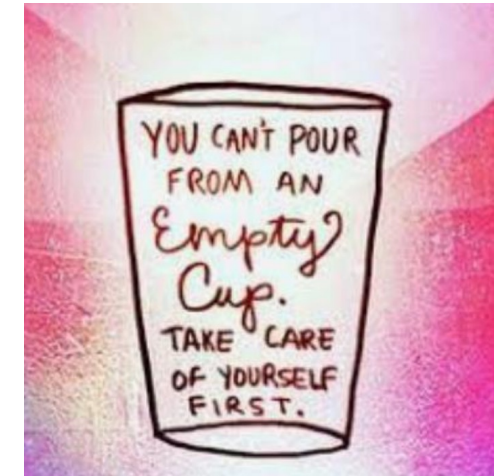
Table. CDC Survey on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic¹⁰



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Some Children More Impacted Than Others

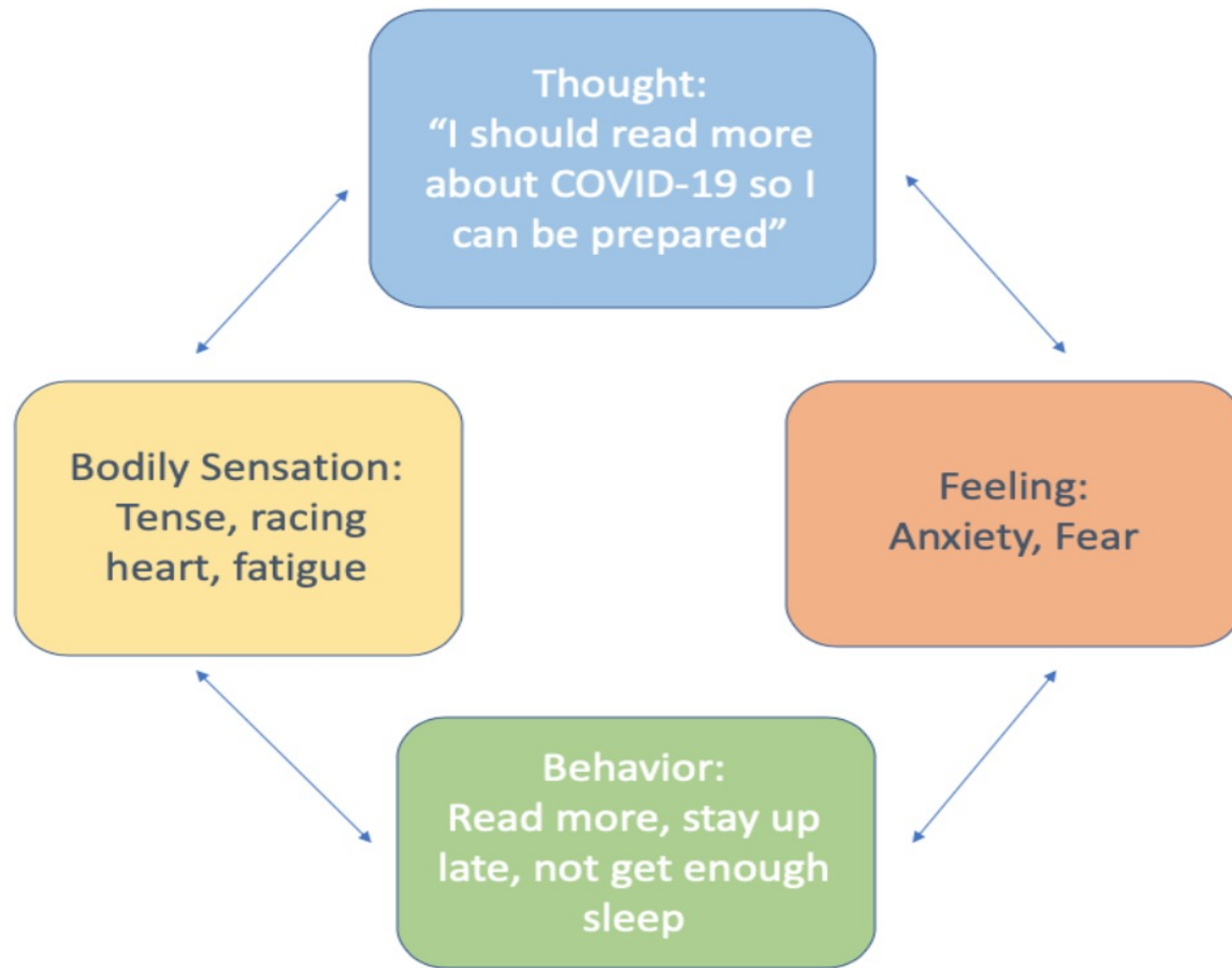
- Children with ASD, pre-existing learning disorders, incl. ADHD, pre-existing anxiety, depression, PTSD, OCD
- Children whose families are under-resourced with time and energy
- Children in homes impacted by major life stressors: divorce, partner conflict, death of family member(s)
- Children whose parents are first-responders
- BIPOC children or children with BIPOC parents
 - Black and Latinx families disproportionately affected

LaGreca & Sevin, 2020

Symptoms of Anxiety Related to the Pandemic

- Anxiety
 - Stress
 - Overwhelm
 - Hopelessness/Helplessness
 - Worry
 - Fears
 - Low mood/depression
 - Loneliness
 - Amotivation
 - Frustration
 - Guilt
- Somatic symptoms:
 - chest tightness
 - SOB
 - restlessness/difficulty relaxing
 - muscle tension
 - HA, other aches/pains
 - sleep disturbance
 - palpitations
 - GI symptoms

Cognitive Distortions Breed Anxiety



Cognitive Distortions

- Black & White, Polarized Thinking
- Overgeneralization
- Catastrophizing
- Mind Reading
- Mental Filtering
- Discounting the Positive
- **"Should" Statements**
- **Personalization**
- Emotional Reasoning
- Labeling

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Legg T. Healthline. Dec 18, 2019. Accessed June 14 2020



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Consider Impact of Quarantine on Adol Devpmtl Needs



Autonomy

Separation

Peer connection

Honesty

Clear expectations

Lancet Child Adolesc Health 2020; 4: 634–40 The effects of social deprivation on adolescent development & mental health

Pre-Pandemic:

- **1 in 5 US children with** diagnosable mental health disorder (CDC 2013)
- 50% mental illness onsets by 14 yrs 75% by 24 (Kessler 2005)
- Suicide = 2nd leading cause of death ages 10-34 (CDC 2019)
- Depression = 7% in adolescents

Post-Quarantine:

- March 2020: ↑ ↑ anxiety sxS (Jiao et al 2020)
- Feb 2021 (Cost 2021) :
 - 70% ages 6-18, & 66% ages 2-5, **worse in 1+ domain** Depression, Anxiety, Irritability, Attention, Hyperactivity, Obsessions/Compulsions
 - 20% school-age, & 32% pre-school age, **better in 1+ domain**
- >25% HS students reported worsened emotional and cognitive health; > 20% parents of 5-12 yo reported their children experienced worsened mental or emotional health.

Loneliness (JAACAP rapid review): strong associations between feelings of loneliness, depression, & mental health problems up to 9 years after the social isolation.

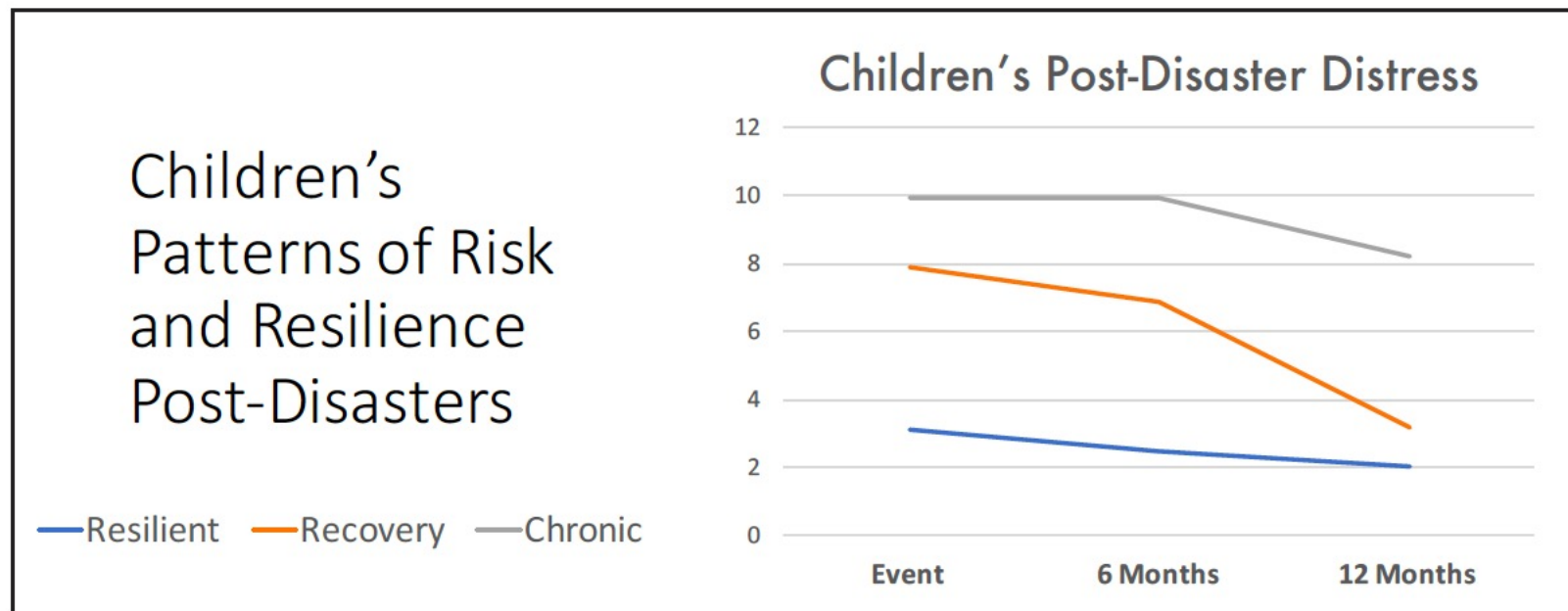
Loneliness duration = stronger predictor of depression than loneliness intensity (Loades 2020)

Pandemic-Related Sleep Disturbances

- Due to:
 - routine disruption
 - altered circadian rhythms
 - increased screen time/decreased natural exposure to sunlight
 - decreased exercise/movement
 - stress/anxiety/mood disorder
 - Results in:
 - fatigue
 - decreased attention
 - impaired cognition
 - irritability/anxiety/depression/SI/substance use
-
- Decreased resilience in the face of anxiety triggers**

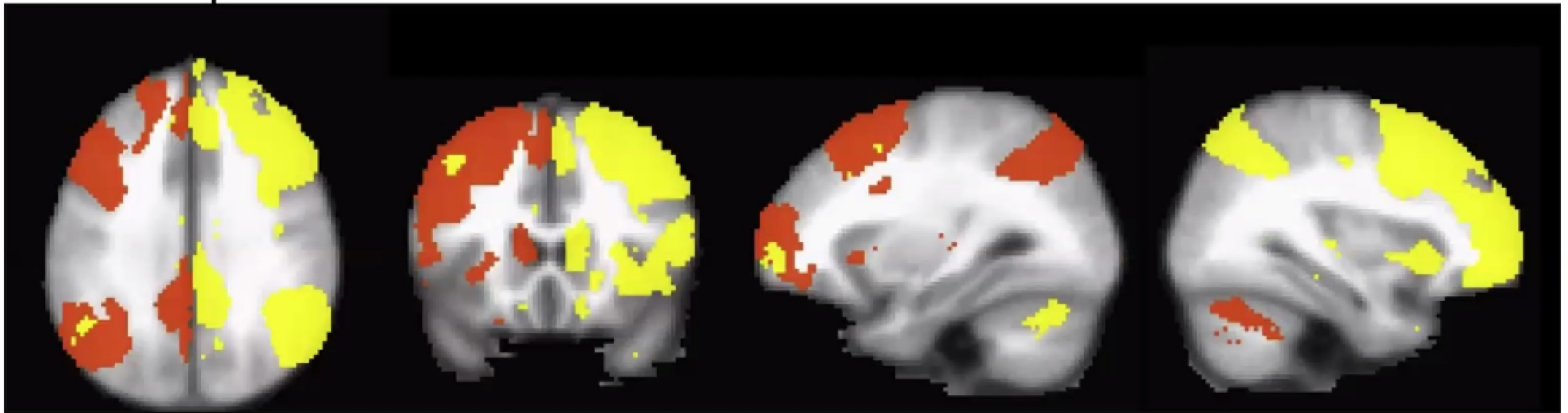
Patterns of Risk & Resilience in Children

- Research after different types of disasters demonstrates the majority of children w/initial distress recover over time; <20% of children are at risk for slow recovery or longer-term difficulties related to stressors; a smaller percentage are chronically distressed & do not recover much over time.



Resilience During COVID

- Pre-COVID (2013-2016) youth aged 9-19 recruited
- fMRI examined resting state coactivation of areas of brain responsible for executive control & cog processes necessary for coping w/challenges & regulating stress response



Building Resilience



Returning to School...School is a Place For...

- Academic instruction
 - Social and emotional skill development
 - Fostering social connections
 - Learning by example from peers and adults
 - Safety
 - Reliable nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - PT/OT/SLT
-
- **Mental health service +/- physical health services**
 - **Ally-ship, mentorship, role modeling, acknowledgement**



How Can We Help?

- Partnership!
 - Listen to parents describe their child
 - Listen to their reaction to their child for clues to family hx
 - Give children/adolescents a choice and a voice
 - Model & promote warm, inviting, patient-centered care
 - Collaborate w/educators and administrators in community & schools
- Realize that it may be more difficult to establish a helping relationship with this population because of their frequent bias toward criticism
- Consider intervening in cognitive distortions via **cognitive restructuring** (can be used anywhere, anytime, in almost any situation)

Omicron Is Making a Mess of Instruction, Even Where Schools Are Open

By [Sarah Schwartz](#) & [Catherine Gewertz](#) — January 06, 2022 | Corrected: January 07, 2022 ⌚ 8 min read

The New York Times

‘Insurmountable’: Parents Grapple With Omicron’s Upending Force in Schools

Some want classrooms to stay open through the surge; others are desperate for a remote option. For nearly all, it’s an agonizing situation.

Omicron School Disruptions Stress Already-Frased Parents—Again

WSJ

The Covid-19 surge is making life unpredictable, as families worry anew about providing care and instruction for their kids if sent home

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Mask tracker: 7 states are dropping school mandates in the coming weeks

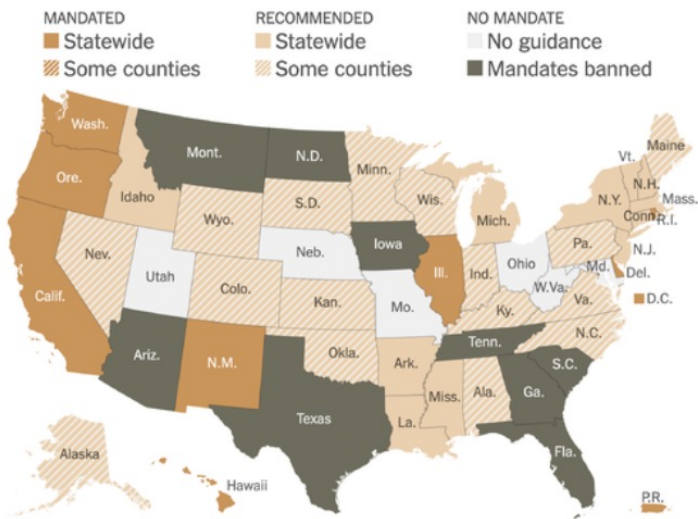
Elected officials in several states have made mask mandates illegal, saying the decision should be left to parents.

By: [Matt Zalaznick](#) | February 11, 2022

See Mask Mandates and Guidance in Each State

Follow the changing rules and recommendations on wearing masks, as well as guidance for masks in schools.

The New York Times



NEW JERSEY 101.5



AP

Governors in 4 states plan for end to school mask mandates

By MIKE CATALINI February 7, 2022

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Learning to Tolerate Uncertainty

- Focus on the present (day to day)
- Coping thoughts
 - “I got through it before”
 - “X is better this time” (we’re vaccinated, boosted, have masks, home test kits, etc).
- Coping behaviors (“X worked before”)
- Distress tolerance (this feeling is not going to last forever)



Discussion Questions

- One attendee's observation has been that parental response to pandemic has direct impact on child's reaction. "the you do you and I'll do me" culture allows for individual approach to navigating this time but parent bhex can lead children down a path of isolation & fear or targeted criticism for being too cavalier. What is the best approach to family guidance if you are concerned a child's MH concerns are impacted by parental response?

Discussion Questions

- DBP:
 - What is the biggest concern in the pediatric population around development and behavior r/t pandemic?
 - The patients we are seeing in DBP clinic are more frequently having involvement of multiple domains, developmentally lower than we have been used to seeing pre-pandemic. Are others having similar experiences? Are there ways to expedite evaluation and treatment for these involved young patients?

Discussion Questions

- Social Media
 - Increased use of social media – what ideas do you have for kids?
 - Teen years are the time we naturally see adolescents asserting their own opinions, which can differ from a parent's perspective. We now have social media to influence their opinions & are often exposed to misinformation. Can you speak to the best approach to address this concern? Social media is not going anywhere. As providers we need to help teens learn a crucial life skill...how to find credible resources to make informed decisions and how to discern the truth from the false narratives.
 - With so many parents relying on smart phones and iPads to entertain young children, with less time playing and exploring outside, have you seen any negative trends in pediatric development and behavior? What can be done to remediate this overuse of technology in especially young children?

Discussion Questions

KIM
ELIZABETH

- ED
 - I am concerned about what I have seen in clinic, which is increased eating disorders in female teens, and lack of communication in teens and parents since COVID despite being home together more often (lots of high risk depression PHQ-9 scores).

Discussion Questions

- How can/could EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Association) best help provide assistance to positively effect the stresses on mental health providers during and in the aftermath of CoVID-19's impact on the mental health of children and adolescents?

Discussion Questions

- Case scenario: A 14 year old is exceptionally intelligent and succeeding in advanced academic coursework but remains shy and socially awkward except with her immediate family and 1 grandparent. What suggestions do you have for helping her come more comfortable with those outside her advanced courses?

Discussion Questions

- Case scenario: 20 year old with history of depression, genetic disorder, developmental disability, needing to quarantine over the holidays due to exposure in the household having a depressive episode and SI. Resources recommended to get through these situations?

Thank You!

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