Our Brains in This Time!

In this moment, parents have suddenly become teachers with a dual role of parenting and teaching while worrying about job loss and teachers are now teaching online and parenting the fears and anxieties of their own children. As Harvard’s Developing Child Center has recently shared, The COVID-19 pandemic has the capacity to affect every person in the world—and how each individual responds can potentially affect everyone else. The stresses of caregiving (for children as well as for adults at greater risk) are rising for everyone. For the millions of parents who were already struggling with low-wage work, lack of affordable childcare, and meeting their family’s basic needs from paycheck to paycheck, the stresses are increasing exponentially.

Three conditions that are difficult for our brains to withstand are: chronic unpredictability, isolation and physical and emotional restraint! This pandemic is heightening all these conditions while repeatedly activating the stress response systems in the developing brain and body.

What can we do? Whether you are a parent, educator, or anyone in this time working with children and youth, I feel these practices and strategies will be very calming and helpful in the moments when we are overcome with fear and the anxiety of the unknown. It takes a calm brain to calm another brain. The good news is our brains and bodies are wired for healing, repair, and a return to a healthy homeostasis, producing an improved state of mind and calmness.

1. Even though we crave routines and predictability we need to know when events or experiences will begin and end. By changing our routines weekly, we can create a beginnings and an endings for our children and students each day or each week especially when we share and teach them about these upcoming plans ahead of time! Again, predictability is important, and this approach enhances the predictable routines with a shift that says, “we are almost at the end, and then we begin again!”

2. Make sure children and youth have contact with their peers or people that they connect with through the airwaves! Make sure they connect with those people in their life that lift them up and see all that is going well and right!! If they are unable to zoom, call or text, writing a letter or note to this individual can feel comforting with the hopes and knowing it will be shared later. Creating a notebook of drawings or images or journal entries about our feelings and thoughts is helpful in this time and this could be a collective activity with family or classmates.

3. Maybe have your students or children create a media broadcast sharing their experiences, and any positives that they can find... create a you tube or face book live and allow the students to share their hearts and minds through a filter that feels good to them! They can share it with their world! Emotional freedom! Not restraint!  
  
4. If you are feeling sad, anxious or a little down, do not be afraid to share this with your students or your own children. They know this already so validate their intuitions and instincts because this creates feelings of safety. Let's hold each other in authentic ways in this time!

5. Brain states will fluctuate often in the upcoming days and weeks! Write a daily or weekly blog or just chart your brain state sharing with family and … It might be fun to create a reality TV show giving students a tour through your home a personal glimpse into your life while asking for students to share their days!

6. Create an “amygdala area post” for ways to relax and calm our anxiety and frustrations when we are home with ideas such as focused attention practices, drinking lots of water, going outside, exercising, and writing in a journal. The journals can be a touch point as the entries can be shared when school resumes and everyone returns to class.

7. Ask students to find an object from around the house, nature or create an image from home that they can share when they come back! This image would encourage connection to you and school giving students something tangible that connects them to a place of safety and connection.

8. Use this time at home to write a letter of gratitude to each student sharing their strengths and bravery this year and a memory of him or her you will always cherish! These letters of appreciation can be repeatedly shared with students during this time while encouraging students to write a letter to classmate expressing gratitude through words or a drawing for something specific, they appreciate in that friend.

9. Focused Attention Practices are in the moment strategies that children and adults can do together, online, or individually and they calm our nervous systems by implementing breath and movement with repetitive rhythms! Below are newly created Focused Attention Practices for educators, students and families! I have shared several articles on Edutopia about these practices. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/brain-breaks-focused-attention-practices-lori-desautels>

See Graphs below!

  
 