

Dear MPS Community,

Superintendent Gormley has asked me to share my thoughts with you as we face this unprecedented crisis together.

Truth is, there's no playbook here. For many and in many ways, this is uncharted territory. We are not facing the aftermath of Katrina or 9/11, but find ourselves needing to live in a different way due to a force beyond our control.

What I can offer is what my work has taught me to be helpful for families when facing a 'chronic crisis'....one that is on-going and may impact our physical health, our mental health and economic health.

### **1. Routine, routine, routine**

When our lives are turned upside down and inside out, it makes us feel 'out of sync' and anxious. The psychological term is 'disregulated'. Our typical way of going, from the simplest example of morning routines, to 'paying the monthly bills' has been disrupted.

Much has been written about establishing routines and schedules for our children. This is helpful. What's even more helpful is creating written schedules for **you, the parent/primary caregiver**. As trite as it sounds, we must put on our own oxygen mask FIRST. We all need to find a balance between 'work-play-rest'. Even now. Especially now. Questions to ask as we formulate our adult daily/weekly schedules;

"If I am working from home, what are my realistic parameters?"

How can I supervise my children and work? How do I ask for help?

When and how will I establish breaks?

How will the daily chores be accomplished?

What will the plan of the day be for me? for my children?

How do I stick to this schedule at least 80% of the time?

This will vary, of course, depending on the nature of our work, our children's ages and capabilities, and whether there is another adult with whom we share responsibilities.

## **2. Tick-tock.....Anxious about *tomorrow*?**

It's almost impossible to not think about the future. How long will I need to isolate myself and my family? When will this forced hibernating be over? For most of us, a day feels like a week. Quote from a mother of three, "It's only 10:30am and I feel like the day should be over now!") There's a 'Ground Hog Day' quality about each day. (For me, the moment I finish breakfast, I am looking forward to lunch in an unprecedented way!)

Best practice? The Zen approach to '**be in the moment**' ; it actually helps us to worry less about that which we cannot control; such as, graduations? flying up from 5<sup>th</sup> grade events? monthly hair appointments?

What we CAN control is within our reach (literally) today. Exercise? FaceTime with a couple of friends? Find a quiet time/space for a precious ½ hour? Binge watch on a new Netflix series tonight? Take a l-o-n-g shower?

Worrying about our children lagging behind educationally, missing out on friendships, team sports, right- of- passage events is understandable but not useful. It's normal to feel sad. These are losses. They are real. We will never get this time back. However, there *will be* time for repairs in our future.

This pandemic had a beginning and it will have an end. And then, there will be time for repair. And in the repair is often where the richness is found. To quote my dear friend and pediatrician, T. Berry Brazelton, MD, "It's in the repair where we get closer." More on this when we are there.....it is coming.

### **3. Togetherness? Really?**

A friend with two teens and a husband at home complained that each of their family of four were in separate spaces within their home....for what seemed like the whole day and what had become the norm for the week. Her fantasies of the family playing board games, cooking meals in the kitchen, sharing popcorn during a movie classic evening- were not happening.

I worry that this is a shared fantasy - that other families in the virtual neighborhood are coordinating, connecting, loving it up. Home-schooling with creativity. And patience.

I believe that humans were not designed for captivity. We are all on a steep learning curve. Be grateful for spacing and pacing! And, if parents stop promoting family fun times, there may be some sweet moments of togetherness, as family members emerge from their caves. Spacing and pacing – a sensible approach.

### **4. The race to nowhere.....Fear of not getting it right!**

Staying at home, managing school-age children 24/7, working from home with new demands for too many Zoom management

meetings, deadlines and expectations,.... It's enough to make anyone feel untethered. (curious use of vocabulary here!)

Thank God for the internet. Really. It is our window to the outside world. That said, its imaginative hourly examples of living with isolation carry messages that can easily make us feel 'less than'. No matter how we get your news, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and even more isolated that we aren't doing enough, or doing it right....or as well as our friends on FB appear. Assess how much time you spend daily on your devices getting Corona virus updates. Consider halving the time for a day or two and see how that feels.

It's so important to know and respect our own situation and our unique family needs, and take stock of our resources that help us cope. Let's face it, there's no way to work productively and keep one's sanity and care for a three-year old during her waking hours. Also, remember that we had stresses that occupied our heads and hearts prior to 'Rona. So..... ease off on imposing expectations for ourselves to over-function.

Instead, consider each day and perhaps each Monday in isolation as **practice** for finding and fine-tuning a reasonable rhythm that works. For all our sakes. Ensuring our emotional and mental health is the best way for us to care of our families. Period.

Maria Trozzi, M.Ed

Author, Talking with Children About Loss, Penguin-Putnam Co-  
Founder, Good Grief Program at Boston Medical Center Assistant  
Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine  
Program Director, Joanna's Place Psychotherapist/Grief and  
Resilience Specialist

Responses to: mariatrozzi@hotmail.com

