

April 2020



Notes from the Head of School

One definition of a crisis is “a disruption or breakdown in a person’s or family’s normal or usual pattern of functioning”. Obviously, how one perceives a crisis can be at a different degree of intensity than someone else however I think we can agree that the Coronavirus has certainly caused a large crisis for all. When you look at situations that can lead to a crisis, they fall under five areas: family situations, economic situations, community situations, significant life events, and natural elements. Arguably the COVID crisis hits almost all of them.

What’s most important is how we respond to the crisis. There are a million articles online about what to do and what not to do, but in the end we need to remember that children are always watching us and how we respond to situations, both good and bad. Here’s advice for parents from the National Association of School Psychologists:

Remain calm and reassuring.

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- What you say and do about COVID-19 can either increase or decrease your children’s anxiety.
- If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available.

- Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
- It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.
- Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.

Avoid excessive blaming.

- When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone.
- It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.
- Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different than the values that you have at home.

Monitor television viewing and social media.

- Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.
- Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
- Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.
- Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.

- Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Be honest and accurate.

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.
- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.

- Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object.

Know the symptoms of COVID-19.


- The CDC believes symptoms appear in a few days after being exposed to someone with the disease or as long as 14 days after exposure.

Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection.

- Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spread of illness:
- Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds (singing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star slowly takes about 20 seconds).
- Cover their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough and throw away the tissue immediately, or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Do not share food or drinks.
- Practice giving fist or elbow bumps instead of handshakes. Fewer germs are spread this way.
- Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over disease spread and will help to reduce their anxiety.
- Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a strong immune system to fight off illness.

The above advice is good in many stressful situations, not just for our present crisis. It's also important to note that many of these are easier said than done, and that it's just as important for us to be good to ourselves as well as our children. WE need to eat well, drink water, and get enough sleep - it's that analogy of putting our own oxygen mask on first. If we aren't good to ourselves, we are no good to others.

As I said before - stay well, be kind, and keep social distancing so we can all be back together soon.

 Mrs. Watts

Teacher's Notes

Finding Our New Normal

At school, we ask the children questions all the time - What do you see? How did that make you feel? What did you learn? These questions help us see through the children's eyes. See what they see, feel what they feel, and learn how they are processing information and experiences. In the last couple weeks we have had to adapt fairly quickly without much warning to a new way of life that none of us are familiar with. Asking simple questions like these will allow you to provide comfort and understand how your child is processing their new schedule.

When my family and I first heard of the school closings, there was panic and uncertainty. My three daughters' first thoughts went straight to their school and sports teams. They were all in disbelief that the assessments they had prepared for all year, and their sports seasons, would possibly be cancelled! We've had a number of conversations about when they will get to play again and how important it is that we distance ourselves for the safety of all. After the reality set in that everything for the next coming months had been altered, we instead started thinking about more important things in life. We began to spend more quality time together without being rushed. We were present and laughed together more. We are making memories that we will take with us long after this is over.

No matter what age your child is, there is some sort of uncertainty when we make changes. A family's schedule changing so drastically can cause unfamiliar feelings. Use this as an opportunity to learn new lessons on what we thought was a priority versus a simpler existence. As a family, you can talk about what life was like before coronavirus and what is now different and new. Discuss what changes you will all make when all of our lives go back to normal.

I like to think that this time we all have been unexpectedly given is a way to reconnect with our favorite people. Learn new skills together, go on adventures in your yard, make up scavenger hunts, play hopscotch, sing new songs, read books together, have lots of unstructured play, be silly, draw in the dirt with sticks, bake new recipes. Let our children remind us what it's like to be a kid again. There is so much good that can come from this time of uncertainty.

It is as if someone has pressed "pause" on everything except what is most important: family and friends. Experience moments with the people you love! Now it is up to us to make this time be a gift of enjoying moments and making new memories that may not have happened if it weren't for this unexpected break. Cherish your family time and have this be a reminder of how much more clearly we can see when we look at life more simply.

In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to.
-Dave Hollis

~ Mrs. Knight

Mrs. Knight teaches in the Beginners and 3 Day room 1 classes

Parents Association Notes

Spring has definitely sprung and hopefully this beautiful weather is helping everyone get outside! We just wanted to touch base and let everyone know that we are all riding through this crazy time together!

As of right now, we are planning our Spring Fling for Thursday, May 14th, with a rain date of Tuesday the 19th and we cannot wait to see everyone again! We are also still planning on doing our teacher appreciation - although the first date was postponed!

Stay tuned for more information on these events as all plans are of course tentative right now.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us with any questions about anything!

Stay safe and healthy -

Diana Stewart and Jess Bisceglia Co-Presidents

5 hand washing songs your preschoolers will love*

* Just in case you're tired of singing 'Happy Birthday' each time you and your child wash hands! (from www.halseyschools.com)



Tops and Bottoms (Tune: Frere Jacques)

Tops and Bottoms, Tops and Bottoms, (Rub top and bottom of hands)

In between, In between, (Rub fingers inside on both hands)

All around our hands, All around our hands, (Just like it says)

Then we wash. Bam, Bam, Bam.

Wash, Wash, Wash Your Hand (To the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat):

Wash, wash

Wash your hands

Wash them nice and clean.

Scrub them here (with hand motion scrubbing together)

Scrub them there (with hand motion scrubbing tops of hands)

And scrub them in between (with hand motion scrubbing between fingers).

Wash, wash, wash, your hands

Play our handy game

Rub and scrub, scrub and rub

Germs go down the drain HEY!

Wash, wash, wash, your hands

Play our handy game

Rub and scrub, scrub and rub

Germs go down the drain HEY!

This is the Way We Wash Our Hands (To the tune of Mulberry Bush):

This is the way we wash our hands

Wash our hands

Wash our hands

This is the way we wash our hands

Before we eat our food.

Continue with these variations: After we play outside. After we play with pets. After we use the potty. After we sneeze or cough.

If You're Happy and You Know It Wash Your Hands!

If you're happy and you know it,

Wash your hands!

If you're happy and you know it,

Wash your hands!

If you're happy and you know it,
then your face will surely show it,

If you're happy and you know it,

Wash your hands!

Twinkle, twinkle little star

Twinkle, twinkle little star,

Look how clean my two hands are,

Soap and water, wash and scrub,

Get those germs off rub-a-dub,

Twinkle, twinkle little star,

Look how clean my two hands are.

The soap on your hands. (Tune: Wheels on the Bus)

The soap on your hands goes sud, sud, sud.

Sud, sud, sud.

Sud, sud, sud.

The soap on your hands goes sud, sud, sud.

And the germs go down the drain.

From The Board of Directors

Tap Dancing in the Bathroom

A few weeks ago I was sitting on a beach in Mexico with my family. While vacations these days are generally anything but relaxing, I distinctly remember reflecting on how smoothly the week had gone overall. I put my feet up on my lounge chair, sipped a frozen drink and soaked in the moment; the baby was sound asleep in the stroller, the twins were happily bobbing around the pool in their puddle jumpers and my husband was teaching our kindergartener how to play chess on a life-sized chessboard. In that moment, my only worry in the world was whose shoulders were starting to look a little bit too pink. We were happily disconnected from the rest of the world and blissfully unaware of the mounting chaos that was occurring at home.

Sometime in the middle of the week, it became evident that the situation at home with COVID-19 was escalating quickly. People were opting to keep their children home from school, supermarket shelves were bare and we weren't sure what we would be coming home to. Navigating Customs and Immigration with four children under the age of six is virtually impossible on any day, but telling my thumb-sucker that she couldn't touch her face as I frantically sanitized hands certainly complicated things. By the time we made our way to the parking garage we were all sweaty and exhausted. As the doors closed on the elevator our drooling baby let out a single cough and the entire elevator fell silent. "She's fine!" I assured our fellow passengers who laughed uncomfortably and looked anything but convinced. So began our new reality.

On social media the response to school closures has been overwhelming. There have been homeschooling schedules posted online, yoga sessions, astronauts reading children's books from outer space, art classes with Mo Willems, live concerts, sample lesson plans, free subscriptions, and emails from just about every specialist at the elementary school. While the resources are certainly plentiful and intended to be helpful, all these options were starting to make my head spin. I have a master's degree in education and an attic full of old teaching supplies but the idea of scheduling our day into academic chunks became comical on day one. At some point as I was chasing my giggling one year old up the stairs, a blue crayon hanging from her teeth, I realized that my high hopes of doing a reading lesson with my son were about to go out the window.

While maintaining basic routines and expectations has proven to be helpful in keeping our days running smoothly, expecting my children to follow a rigorous school schedule in this strange new situation just wasn't realistic for our family. At some point I took a deep breath and realized that as scary and stressful as this situation has been for us as adults, our children are as blissfully unaware as I was on the beach just a few weeks ago. They will likely look back on this time at home as just one of many happy childhood memories.

As parents we always say that we wish we could stop the clock and soak in this precious time with our sweet babies, because they grow up so quickly. Perhaps that is the silver lining here. These lazy mornings cuddling in our pajamas and mixing pancakes in the kitchen has been a welcome break from the normal rat race of rushing to the bus stop. Having my son home again feels like a gift, because frankly kindergarten came far too quickly for me and I miss him when he is off at school all day.

When I think of Berrybrook's founder Katharine Mann and the pillars with which she founded this special school, I feel more grounded. Providing a day for my children centered on healthy emotional development, their growing self-esteem and confidence somehow feels much more manageable. We have taken time to slow down and explore the things that are all around us. What a perfect time of year to learn in the natural world! In return, I've seen the children blossom in new ways as well. The girls have been able to master their colors while finding new flowers in bloom in the garden, and my son has had fun identifying plants and measuring their growth over time. The baby has conducted multiple taste tests on fistfuls of dirt! On rainy days, curling up on the couch with a stack of picture books and indulging requests for "just one more" feels refreshing and necessary. I've watched their confidence grow as well, trying new things and giggling with pride at their own accomplishments; riding a bike without training wheels for the first time, zipping up a coat, pumping on the swings without a push. All of this, with an abundance of opportunity to work through conflict (the verdict is still out on who had that yellow shovel first)!

Today the twins had their usual Monday morning dance class, only this week it was online; yet another way that we have adapted to this new, temporary way of life. We laced up their tap shoes and I ushered them into the only room in the house where I felt confident that they couldn't destroy my floors. As I watched the girls attentively follow their teacher's instruction I had to chuckle. Someday in the not too distant future, we will look back on this moment and laugh, "remember that time we tap danced in the bathroom?"

As we explore new ways to distantly socialize in upcoming weeks, I'll try my best to savor these moments and I look forward to how much sweeter that perfect vanilla cone will taste on Ice Cream Day when we are all reunited again. Until then, I'm hoping you are all giving yourselves a little grace as we navigate these uncharted waters together. Wishing you all good health and a whole lot of love. See you soon!

Emily Balboni

Berrybrook Board of Directors