

PARENT UPDATE ON
LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL --
STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES FOR THE TRANSITION AHEAD

On April 6, 2021, Minding Your Mind clinical director Jon Mattleman offered a special parent/caregiver presentation on how we can manage anxiety, optimize resilience, and keep our families in balance as COVID-19 restrictions relax, kids go back to school, and we resume some level of normalcy.

OVERVIEW

Mattleman acknowledged that the pandemic has made life challenging for EVERYONE, creating emotional overload as we deal with loss, anger, grief, frustration, and a lot of transitions. Like an over-active smoke detector, the anxiety of the moment can hi-jack the brain and make it tricky to focus and process well, and this can lead to self-destructive behavior and real emotional and physical symptoms. So we need to shift expectations. It's OK not to be OK. But there *is* light at the end of the tunnel, and though COVID is still part of our world – we're all in it together. Talking and listening are the most powerful tools we have, and there are many other ways to help our families stay in balance.

MATTLEMAN'S KEY STRATEGIES

As kids transition back to school, some helpful phrases –

Tell me more...
I'm listening
Let's breathe together
On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad are you feeling?
Name three things that could help?
How can I help?
I'm sorry
I care about you

Tips for Supporting Someone with Anxiety

Anxiety is different for each person
Focus on positive and validating statements
Avoid avoidance – talking about problems don't trigger them
Create realistic expectations
It's all about management, tolerance
Don't pass along your own anxiety, and model healthy responses to anxiety
Limit social media, which can feed anxiety
Know when and how to use distractions – during an anxiety/panic attack, distraction (like holding ice cubes!) can help calm and refocus
Debrief later – ask what “self-talk” accompanied the crisis and what might have helped
Know when to seek professional assistance – depth of an issue over a period of time

How to Help Adolescents Pivot

Focus on what you can control, what is going well
Ask, don't assume – acknowledge and validate
Avoid shallow statements, such as “everything will be OK”
Talk to other parents about what they're experiencing
Guilt and self-anger aren't productive – model calm. give yourself a “time out” if needed
Reinforce their ability to cope, point out what they'd doing well
Address changes in sleep, regression, withdrawal – re-establish routines
Practice and discuss safe distancing habits
Preview what the next day will be like, leave extra time in the mornings
If struggling, reach out to guidance and/or consider a “mental health day off”
Lighten up on academic expectations – transitions are exhausting for everyone

When, Where, What. & How to Talk to Your Kids –

Best thing to do is listen
Worry time – short time, maybe late afternoon, for talking about worries
In the dark
Over a movie/book
Talk about their friends
Share your thoughts
Be honest
Be creative – art, music, etc.
Check in, have ongoing conversations

Prioritize Self-Care

This is not selfish, but makes you a better parent
Examine your priorities and needs - what actually makes you feel rejuvenated? (Exercise, being in nature, being creative, meditating, etc.)
Implement boundaries - time, space, money, energy
Make “peace” with the discomfort of saying “No”
Aim for less tech, unless it's fun
Ask for support and/or delegate
Listen to/trust your internal voice
Limit time with people/places/things that are draining
Indulge in “emergency joys,” like ice cream
Give up perfection
Embrace mindfulness (breathing exercises, etc.) and share ideas with kids

RESOURCES - *getting mental health help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength* **National**

- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741-741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline [1-800-273-TALK\(8255\)](tel:1-800-273-TALK(8255))
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Samaritans 1-877-870-HOPE (4673) Call or Text <https://samaritanshope.org/>
- Self-Injury Hotline: 1-800-366-8288
- National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA): 1-800-931-2237
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
- Substance Abuse Hotline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

- Minding Your Mind: www.mindingyourmind.org

Local

- [Brookline Department of Public Health Adolescent](#)
- [B-PEN \(Brookline Parent Education Network\)](#)
- [Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Brookline Public School Counseling and Clinical Services](#)

Books, Articles, Apps...

- [The 50 Best Stories and Strategies to Help Children of All Ages ...](#)
- [The Coping Skills for Kids Workbook](#)
- [Teens with Anxiety: 5 Books to Read](#)
- Apps: Calm, Rootd, Dare, Shine, ibreathe

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