



CAMPION SCHOOL
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Dear Parents/Staff,

I hope my letter finds you and your family in good health. Staying isolated for prolonged periods of time is difficult so I wanted to write this letter to remind you of what a brilliant job you are doing so far. The letter also contains some advice concerning mental health.

The easy rule, to stay home/self-isolate and behave as if we are already carrying the virus and we do not wish to spread it, seems to be working for Greece. The fact that people in Greece are behaving responsibly so far is very encouraging and promising. Keep up the good work!

Everyone by now is being made aware of the physical effects of the Coronavirus and what we should look out for if symptoms arise. However, social distancing and isolation for weeks may take a toll on mental health with effects that are yet unknown. Uncertainty provokes anxiety, fear of the unknown and stress. In the current global situation, everyone from young children to adults will be feeling a mix of emotions and some people will be placed in situations that are new and/or potentially damaging.

If you're anxious about how to protect and nurture your children through this crisis — often juggling work obligations at the same time — you're in good (virtual) company, the whole planet is going through the same situation.

Here are Some Mental Health Signs to Watch Out for

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviours they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bed-wetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleep disturbances (insomnia, nightmares, waking in the night)
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviours. Many start to push boundaries, displaying higher levels of aggression, disobeying instructions or getting into more arguments with family members.
- Poor school performance or avoiding online school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain (stomach aches)
- Clingy tendencies. Some kids may oscillate between acting very clingy to rejecting and withdrawing from others.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Here are some tips that might help calm fears, manage stress and keep the peace.

- Keep routines in place

The experts all agree that setting and sticking to a regular schedule is key, even when you're all at home all day. Children should get up, eat and go to bed at their normal times. Consistency and structure are calming during times of stress. Children benefit from knowing what's going to happen and when.

- Be creative about new activities and exercise

Incorporate new activities into your routine like doing a puzzle or having family game time in the evening. Build in activities that help everyone get some exercise (without engaging in contact with other children or items they may have touched such as playground equipment). Take a daily walk or bike ride or do yoga — great ways to let kids burn off energy and ensure that everyone is staying active.

- Manage your own anxiety

It's completely understandable to be anxious right now (how could you not be?) but how you manage that anxiety has a big impact on your children. If you're feeling overwhelmed, step away and take a break. That could look like taking a shower or going outside or into another room and taking a few deep breaths. Talking to children in a clear, reasonable way about what's going on is the best way to help them understand. But remember kids do not need to know every little thing.

- Limit consumption of news

Staying informed is important, but it's a good idea to limit consumption of news and social media. Turn the TV off and mute or unfollow friends or co-workers who are prone to sharing panic-inducing posts.

- Stay in touch

Let children use social media (within reason and if age appropriate) and Skype or FaceTime to stay connected to peers even if they aren't usually allowed to do so. Communication can help kids feel less alone and mitigate some of the stress that comes from being away from their friends.

- Make plans

In the face of events that are scary and largely out of our control, it's important to be proactive about what you *can* control. Making plans helps you visualise the near future. Assign children tasks that will help them feel that they are part of the plan and making a valuable contribution to the family.

- Check in with younger children

Young children may be oblivious to the facts of the situation, but they may still feel unsettled by the changes in routine, or pick up on the fact that people around them are worried and upset. Children who are having more than the usual tantrums, being defiant or acting out may actually be feeling anxious. Pick a calm, undistracted time and gently ask how they're feeling and make sure to respond to outbursts in a calm, consistent, comforting way.

- Give yourself a minute

Remember to be reasonable and kind to yourself.

You should forgive yourself the image of perfection that you normally aspire to as parents. Maybe your children don't have TV or screens on the weeknights during the school year, but now that school is online, you can give yourself license to relax these boundaries a bit and re-institute them once more when life returns to more normal.

- Accept and ask for help

Be creative and be flexible and try not to be hard on yourself. You have to find a balance that works for your family. The goal should be to stay sane and stay safe.

We're all being asked to slow down and reevaluate our priorities. This may bring us all back to baseline in understanding what's really important.

- Help them practice mindfulness

Mindfulness techniques can be very helpful in situations where our routines are disrupted and we feel overwhelmed by frustration and disappointment. Mindfulness teaches us to tune into our emotions in any given moment and experience them without judgement.

In what's called "radical acceptance," we let ourselves sit with our emotions rather than fight them. You tell yourself it's okay to feel anxious right now. It's okay to feel scared. It's okay to feel angry. You're accepting the feelings you have and validating them because we're all having those feelings. It's really important that you accept them as they are rather than fighting them. This then allows us to move on and say, "Okay, now what needs to be done?"

Do not stress about schoolwork, teachers will get your children back on track. Share your time, your strength, your love, your laughter with them and your children will be exactly where they need to be, amongst friends and family, loved and reassured that everything is under control.

For a bit of light entertainment, I have created a Champion-edition Harry Potter quiz for a bit of fun. Feel free to share it with your children.

<https://quiz.tryinteract.com/#/preview/5ea07a6b8bbf9d0014140a48>

Stay Healthy - Stay at Home

If you or your child have any further concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me kkonstantopoulou@champion.edu.gr or your child's year tutor.

Yours sincerely,

Konstantina Konstantopoulou

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