



March 26, 2020

Dear EDS Parents,

My name is Allison Parr-Plasha and I am the consulting Guidance Counselor at EDS. Although the amount of time I spend each week at EDS is brief, I have had the privilege of getting to know many of your children throughout the years.

I can't emphasize enough how grateful I am for the staff and faculty at EDS. How lucky are we to be affiliated with a school that immediately transformed themselves in to a temporary online school. They have made it look easy! As a parent of a fifth grader, EDS has significantly reduced the stress for us as a family during this time global crisis.

There are no words to adequately describe what is currently happening in our global world. There are many unknowns and whether we like it or not, we are all being forced to surrender day by day and sometimes hour by hour. For those of us who like to be in the know, this is an especially difficult time. Add our children in to the mix and our current reality becomes that much more complicated.

When we get overwhelmed by all of the unknowns, it's important to search and attend to what we do know. For example, I know that COVID-19 is personally impacting all of us in vastly different ways. I know it is important for me and I would suggest for all of you to attempt to refrain from assumptions. Your personal experience of COVID-19 may be vastly different than other individuals and families at Erie Day school. As we all know, the death toll and unwellness is rising by the minute. People have unexpectedly lost their jobs. Businesses are closed, some permanently. Financial strain. Emotional strain. Our health care workers and those involved in "essential" businesses continue to go to work despite the risk to themselves and their loved ones. Often forgoing their own concerns to serve others.

Our stories are all vastly different. Including our household stories. Some of us are single parenting and have used ongoing socialization and school as a way of feeling centered and connected. Some of us have children who have special needs and their connections to the world outside their homes was a vital resource. Not all relationships are healthy and the busy badge can no longer serve as a way of avoiding discomfort within the home. Others have wild toddlers or kids that literally use socialization and athletics as a ways of burning off excess energy...so everyone is able to remain calm, cool and collected.

Some of our families are simply inconvenienced. Their health and their families' health remain robust. Their work life continues as is and in some ways may be prospering. There is no right

or wrong. However, it is important to hold that how we are experiencing this surreal time cannot be compared.

So how do we charter these unknown waters? How do we be the captains of our family ship so that our kids don't get lost in anxiousness and the stress of the unknown?

Routine. Routine is essential whenever anyone is in any type of crisis or experiencing significant change. It keeps us tethered so that we don't get swept away by the unknown. It will help minimize your own anxiety and the anxiety of your children. It will help keep the natural stress of change more minimal. Everyone will then know what to do and their roles.

We are all being asked to establish a new routine. The more detailed the routine, the better. Establish a routine for yourself first. What time will you wake up every day? What time will you go to bed? What would serve you in the morning to help you keep calm? When can you get alone time? What type of exercise? When? Child-care? Work hours? Work routine? Your children will respond to you better and there will be less need for any type of discipline if you are clear on your own role and stay centered in your routine.

Once that is established, create a routine for your child/children/family. If you haven't written out a routine for yourself and your family, I would highly recommend you do this ASAP. Have a written copy for yourself and for your children. Make sure it is visible for all to see. This will hold all of you accountable to stay on task. Establishing times is important. For example, if you have a set time for exercise, meal-times and social media/tv/computer this eliminates nagging questions about "when and why." And you are much more likely to follow through. The boundaries are in place and clear. It will also eliminate the potential of letting yourself and your children get ungrounded. If you have an established bedtime/waking up/bathing routine, you are less likely to experience stress and will most likely be more energized.

Depending on your child's age, you can involve them in the design of the routine. Empower them. Perhaps they would like to make their own breakfast. Or add art projects to the routine. Maybe they want to add to their bedtime routine. How can you make the routine fun....for everyone? Is there a way you might be more creative? Something to look forward to? Taco Tuesday? Maple Syrup Sunday? Whacky Wednesday?

Self –Care. An overused word that holds important meaning. We simply cannot help anyone else unless we are helping ourselves first. It is imperative that we all keep our immune system strong. Sleep. 7 to 9 hours a night. Eat at least three healthy meals a day. Do what you need to do to create alone time. Abstain or significantly reduce your alcohol intake. Keep yourself in check emotionally. If you are feeling alone, upset, afraid or have been significantly impacted by what is happening....reach out for help. Friend, family member, pastor, religious support or therapist, life coach etc., etc. Try to disengage in unhealthy behaviors that might disrupt self-care. Adults need bedtime rituals just as much as children. So turn off the tv and computer at a designated time and instead maybe read, take a bath, pray, meditate, etc.

Boundaries. It is easy to forget that little ears are around us in the midst of crisis. Sounds also carry. Be mindful of the TV and radio. Even if your children are very young, they are picking up on the emotional tone which can create anxiety for them. Consider receiving your news from a more private source by reading it on your phone/computer. Listen to the radio in the car when your kids are not in it. Talk to your partner about your concerns in private making sure your children cannot hear. We want their immune systems to stay strong and we all know stress negatively impacts it. Because our children are in elementary school, they don't need to know the details. Less is best. Be logical. Educate them about what they need to know in terms of washing their hands and not touching their faces. Do not share your emotional concerns with your children. That is best left to the adults.

Establish physical boundaries. Designate specific areas for specific functions. For example, I set up a make-shift corner in our living room for our daughter for her zoom calls. I hung up a cork board for important info and an end table is now her new locker for her books/notebooks. I have an area in our home where my husband and I conduct our business. Keep your children informed when and if you are working, claiming alone time, needing one on one time with your partner or a particular child and then set a boundary. i.e. "for the next half-hour you can only interrupt me/us if you are hurt." Give them something to do. A task. A project. A show to watch or a game to play.

Give yourself a time limit to how much you expose yourself to the news. And how much you talk about the unrest. It's easy to get lost in all that is going wrong. If you choose to new series to watch on your tv, consider watching something that is uplifting and calming. Choose nourishing books that uplift your spirits. Shift your perspective and listen to the birds, watch the buds beginning to bloom. Practice gratitude. And make a list on all that is right and going right. A friend recently said that earth is taking a giant inhale. It is now visibly recognizable how the pollution is clearing as we are forced to slow down our impact.

Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. Daily...sometimes hourly. We are all navigating a new way of living. If we catch things early-on we can often avoid an upset. It's okay to ask for what you need. You can gently tell your loved ones what you love about them and then gently ask them to refrain from what is bothering you.

Change the scene. Go outside. Go for a drive. Play outside. Hike. Get creative. We get to be outdoors. Look to nature. Although our lives may feel unstable, nature is always consistent. The sun always rises and sets. As does the moon. Nature can be a compass guiding us back to our natural state of peace.

Socialize in a new way. I set up our first zoom playdate for our daughter last week and I would suggest you do the same. Set up your device in the playroom and they will do the rest. Although are physically distant, there are other ways we can still connect.

These are just a few tips and ideas. I will send more as things unfold. The Erie Day School Guidance Page has been really quiet the past few years. I will activate that again. Please join

us. Perhaps this is a place where we can share our creative ideas and inspirations so that we can feel our connectivity.

Sending you well wishes, peace and health.

Sincerely,

Allison Parr-Plasha, M.S.S.A.,C.P.C.C.